



THE INDEPENDENT

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THURSDAY 13 MARCH 1997

WEATHER: Fine with sunny spells

(IR45p) 40p

INSIDE THE TABLOID

EDUCATION+

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Homework:
how to get
it right

THE TABLOID

Adam Mars-Jones
reviews *The English
Patient* 6 PAGES OF FILMS

COMMENT

John Walsh's Diary
the state of middle
class enjoyments 117



Commons committee says voucher scheme is unlikely to raise standards or improve parental choice

Tories scorn Major's nursery revolution

John Major's flagship nursery voucher scheme is unlikely to raise standards, increase parental choice, or even provide extra places for children, according to a damning report from an influential Tory-dominated Commons committee.

According to the report, leaked to *The Independent* last night, the Education and Employment Select Committee believes that vouchers will not boost private and voluntary nurseries. In fact, they may squeeze them out of the picture.

The revelation is bound to prove damaging to the Prime Minister, who has personally promoted vouchers and who hoped they would boost his party's election chances. Under the scheme, piloted in four local authorities over the past year, parents of all four-year-olds will receive £1,100 in vouchers for their education from 1 April, four weeks before the general election.

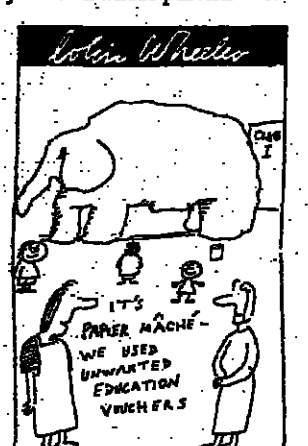
The report has caused a split among Conservatives on the committee, some of whom felt it was far too critical of the scheme. It was finalised last night after weeks of wrangling and should be published before the election.

Based on studies of the four pilot areas - Kensington and Chelsea, Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham and Norfolk - it says that even where there has been some success, it

EXCLUSIVE
by Fran Abrams

is too early to say whether it will be repeated throughout the country.

The four aims of the scheme, according to the report, are to promote parental choice, to ensure good quality, to extend pre-school provision to all four-year-olds whose parents want it



and to safeguard the private and voluntary sectors. Its conclusions cast doubt on every one of these.

The primary problem, the report says, is that the scheme has led to more four-year-olds being recruited into reception classes by schools anxious to

safeguard both pupil numbers and funding. This has adversely affected its chances of success in every one of its objectives. Parental choice "would not be enhanced" if schools took more pupils to the detriment of nurseries and playgroups, it adds.

The report goes on to contradict claims by the Department for Education and Employment that the problem might not be as severe as had been suggested. Most local authorities have already changed their admissions policies in order to take more four-year-olds, it adds, and have thus put private and voluntary providers at risk.

Even the ministers in charge of the scheme accept that vouchers have made little difference to parental choice. Families in rural areas have had to accept whatever is available locally, while nurseries and schools in London say they cannot offer extra places because they have no room to expand.

The portents are "mixed" on whether the scheme will increase the number of places. However, the report details evidence that some local playgroups and private nurseries may be forced to close.

"Overall, evidence... remains inconclusive on the likelihood of the scheme significantly expanding provision for four-year-olds," it says.



Small beginnings: Children playing at lunchtime at Saffron Walden nursery school, Essex

Photograph: Brian Harris

On quality, the report is particularly damning. The primary school reception classes in which most pupils will find themselves may well not provide proper nursery education.

Their classes are often too large, teachers inadequately trained and facilities inappropriate. And while they may be able to enter adequately for pupils who are almost five, they are unlikely to do so for those who are only just four.

"Such classes may not be appropriate for their educational needs and therefore may not be providing high-quality education," the report says.

Basic standards set by government advisers are treated as the norm, rather than the absolute minimum. In many schools and playgroups, it suggests. This, too, "could be detrimental to the quality of education".

Far from helping the private and voluntary sectors, as John Major himself hoped it would, the scheme is actually likely to make life harder for them, the committee says.

There was evidence that state primary schools "were pressuring parents into taking up places... The overall effect of the scheme was to hoover all

four-year-olds into schools". And "instead of increasing provision in private and voluntary settings [the scheme is] actually threatening their viability in many cases", it says.

The report adds that the scheme is time-consuming and involves "a considerable amount of work" for schools.

David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said last night that the report was "a damning indictment" of this crucial Tory policy. "That is why Labour is proposing to replace it with sensible planned partnerships at a local level," he said.

Leading article, page 15

Anorexic detained

A High Court judge has broken legal ground by ordering an anorexic teenager at risk of starving to be detained for treatment - by force if necessary. The 16-year-old became anorexic at 14 and has threatened to commit suicide.

Israeli Prime Minister and the United States prepares to attend a meeting with European and Arab diplomats in Gaza next Sunday. Page 10

Andrew back in play
Rob Andrew, 34, who retired from international rugby 18 months ago after winning 70 caps, has been called into the England squad for Saturday's final Five Nations championship match against Wales in Cardiff as cover for injury doubt Paul Grayson. Sport, page 28

Hussein's anger

The Israeli faced increasing international isolation as King Hussein of Jordan vented his rage at "tragic actions" initiated by Benjamin Netanyahu in a letter to the

leading article, page 15

Hogg: I have a grip on meat safety

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor
Katherine Butler
Brussels

Douglas Hogg, the Minister of Agriculture, told the Commons yesterday that he had got a grip of meat safety and that criticism contained in leaked "pieces of paper" were in effect so much "hogwash".

Condemning his many critics out of hand, the minister said: "This irresponsible scaremongering will not only damage the meat industry here in Britain, but will also damage our standing in Europe."

"The fact that it is hysterical, irresponsible and ill-informed will not be understood in Europe. They will simply treat

it at face value." That could be soon tested because the European Commission is planning to send a team of veterinary inspectors to Britain.

The furore in Britain over failure to enforce rules to protect consumers against BSE, E. coli or other potentially fatal infections has triggered alarm in a number of European Union capitals not just about British beef but also about the safety of British lamb, pork, ham and chicken which are still widely exported to the continent.

Brussels last week demanded a copy of the 54-page government hygiene inspector's report, allegedly suppressed because it revealed shocking lapses. But last night a Com-

mission spokesman confirmed that nothing has been submitted. "We are still waiting," he said.

No dates have been agreed for the Commission's inspection, but sources said some urgency would be required to determine the full extent of the problems as soon as possible.

"This is a source of great concern to the Commission but also to the member states which rely

on British certification that the meat exported from the UK has been slaughtered in keeping with strict EU hygiene relations," a Commission official said.

It also emerged yesterday that an EU inspection of four abattoirs during a spot check in Britain last June found "serious weaknesses". The slaughterhouses were found to be flouting anti-BSE rules which require

the removal of certain cattle tissues, but were also failing to safeguard against contamination of meat by animal faeces.

Faced with a barrage of leaked evidence that the ministry had suppressed one report on abattoir cleanliness, had taken no action on inspectors' allegations of a "timebomb" of declining standards, and had ignored repeated local authority warnings of inadequate resources to tackle food safety, Mr Hogg said meat hygiene standards were being driven up.

He told the Liberal Democrat spokesman, Paul Tyler: "I very much regret the fact, but I accept that over a long period of time people have become sceptical about assurances that

they have received from ministers and others."

But he added: "That scepticism is not justified, but it is a fact and it needs to be recognised and acknowledged."

However, he told the House that any public inquiry would completely vindicate his position. Against a background of spluttering protest, he said: "I have the advantage of knowing the facts and therefore I am able to say what the outcome is going to be: that the decision to set up the Meat Hygiene Service was a very sound one... and that during the last two years there has been a substantial improvement in standards, there's more to be done and the Government's gripping it."



Wole Soyinka: 'Dissent will last as long as Abacha'

Nobel winner charged with treason

James Roberts

The Nobel prize-winning writer Wole Soyinka was yesterday charged with treason by Nigeria's military government over a spate of recent bomb blasts in the country. Since December last year a series of blasts on army buses has killed three soldiers and wounded dozens more. Soyinka, along with 11 other dissidents, faces the death penalty if convicted.

The winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for literature was one of many opposition figures who

fled Nigeria two years ago to Europe and the United States, where they have campaigned against the military government of General Sani Abacha. The military regime annulled the Nigerian general election of 1993, thus preventing its presumed winner, the wealthy businessman Moshood Abiola, from being installed as president. Abiola was jailed in 1994, when he declared himself president, and Soyinka and other opposition figures have since then campaigned to have the annulled poll recognised.

General Abacha, who seized power in November 1993, four months after the elections, is implementing a transition plan he says will allow him to hand power to a democratically elected president in 1998.

But his critics say he intends to use the plan to retain power, and point to his bloody human rights record. Gen Abacha's regime executed the dissident playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other opponents in November 1993.

Charging Soyinka could pave the way for Nigeria to try to get him extradited back home. The accused dissidents face a two-count charge of "conspiracy to levy war against the federal military government of Nigeria" and "causing explosions in various parts of Nigeria."

Soyinka, who condemned the country's rulers in a 1996 book entitled *The Open Sore of a Continent*, said yesterday he was not surprised to be charged with treason because it was clear Gen Abacha wanted to "eliminate" him.

"We learned the decision to try us on treason charges had

been taken before the recent violence... The whole thing is orchestrated. Abacha is trying to get rid of us," the writer said by telephone from California.

Soyinka said he did not know who was behind the bombings, but thought the army could be responsible, as it was so divided. "Dissent in Nigeria... will not go away until Abacha has gone. But this is a marathon, not a sprint," he said.

Eight of the 12 dissidents are in Nigeria and were brought to court yesterday. The case was adjourned to 9 May.

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THE BROADSHEET
Business & City 19-23
Comment 15-17
Foreign News 10-14
Gazette 18

Home News 2-9
Leading Articles 15
Letters 15
Obituaries 18
Shares 22

Sport 24-28
THE TABLOID
Arts Reviews 19
Dilemmas 12
Film 4-9

Graduate Plus 13
Listings 20,21
Management 17
Radio & TV 23,24
Weather 22



news

significant shorts

Bleak future for shipyard as MoD contract is lost

The future of the Kvaerner Govan shipyard on the Clyde and 1,200 jobs were under threat last night after the loss of a crucial £200m Ministry of Defence order. The Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, who had pledged to do all he could to secure the contract for two Royal Navy tankers, came under fierce attack. Sigbjørn Ellingsen, managing director of Kvaerner Govan, described the decision to award the contract to GEC Marine's VSEL yard at Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, as a "severe blow". He warned that up to 1,000 jobs would be lost by the end of the year. Kvaerner took over the yard in 1988 and successfully carved out a niche for specialist commercial vessels. But the MoD said that the VSEL bid offered the "best value for money for the taxpayer".

Tagging scheme to be extended

Trials of electronic tags for criminals are to be extended for a third time because the courts have refused to place enough offenders under "house arrest". Since the tags were launched in July 1995, only 325 offenders have faced a curfew order monitored by electronic tags, which is far less than officials had predicted. The Home Office is understood to be preparing to extend the trials, currently held in Reading, Norfolk, and Manchester, for a further year and expand the catchment areas.

Harry Fletcher, of the National Association of Probation Officers, said the tagging experiment had been a catalogue of failures. "They are now looking to tag fine defaulters and others for whom it will serve no purpose," he said. Jason Bennett

Neo-Nazi group members jailed

Three members of the extreme right-wing group Combat 18 were jailed by an Old Bailey judge yesterday for possessing material designed to stir up racial hatred. Two of the men were given 17 months and a third 12 months by Judge Henry Pownall QC, who said that the issue of the group's magazine, *Combat 18*, and CDs found in their possession could only be described as "threatening, abusive and insulting". The three cannot be named for legal reasons.

Straw looks to role models



Young offenders could be helped by adult "mentors" to act as positive role models under Labour's shake-up of the youth justice system. Jack Straw (left), the shadow Home Secretary, said yesterday. He said existing experimental schemes showed that they could encourage educational attainment, keep young people away from drugs and help them cope with adverse peer pressure and build self-esteem.

Offenders could also be asked to carry out reparation work for victims under Labour's proposed "final warning", replacing the current cautioning system. Mr Straw cited last November's Audit Commission report, *Misspent Youth*, which found no case in which a young offender even asked to write a letter of apology to their victim.

Patricia Wynn Davies

'Standard' to be prosecuted

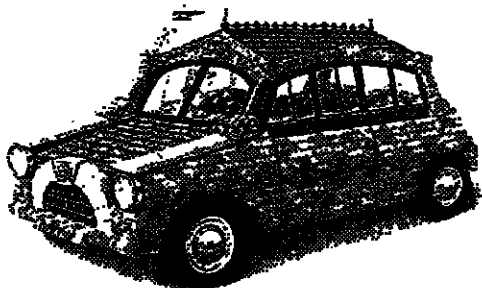
The Attorney General plans to bring contempt proceedings against the London *Evening Standard* newspaper, over an article which led to the abandonment of the Whittemoor prison IRA breakout trial.

Five IRA prisoners and an armed robber were the defendants at the January trial, where they were accused of breaking out of the top security prison in Cambridgeshire. Proceedings at Woolwich Crown Court, south-east London, were stopped after the newspaper published an article on life inside the neighbouring Belmarsh prison which identified three of the defendants as convicted IRA men in contravention of an order imposed by the judge.

Four teenagers die in car crash

Four teenagers killed in a car crash in Yorkshire yesterday were believed to be from Harrogate Grammar School. The four girls died when their red Peugeot 106 car left the road near Harrogate, hit a tree and burst into flames. A police spokesman said the crash did not involve any other vehicles. Identities of the victims were being withheld until relatives had been informed.

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people



Special scoop: Ben and Jerry, the American makers of designer ice cream, in London yesterday for the launch of a new flavour in aid of Comic Relief. The company, which nurtures an ethical image, has put the face of the comedian Lenny Henry on the side of the tubs of Fudge Behaving Badly and pledged to donate 50p to good causes for every one sold (Photograph: Edward Symes)

Parky and Auntie back together

He flirted with Shirley Maclaine, was verbally assaulted by Muhammad Ali and almost castrated by Ennu, the manic puppet. Now Michael Parkinson, doyen of chat show hosts, is being wooed back by the BBC. The corporation is expected to make an announcement about Parkinson, 61, in the next few weeks and he is poised to sign a lucrative deal. He is likely to interview some of the stars he has sparred with before, including Diana Rigg, Raquel Welch and Richard Harris. BBC producers were impressed by ratings for the recent repeats of his first interview, BBC1's Controller, Michael Jackson, said yesterday: "What we want to see is a return to the completely straightforward asking of intelligent questions on a chat show. That is the challenge we will be putting to Michael Parkinson."

Parkinson's original series ended in 1982 after 11 years and it regularly attracted more than 12 million viewers. Mr Jackson said at the BBC's spring programming launch yesterday that he will not be changing his schedules to deal with the launch of Channel 5 at the end of the month. "We won't say exactly what we are putting on on Easter Sunday," he said. "But there is always a special schedule for Easter. Channel 5 won't change our



commitment to having a broad range of programmes." Channel 5 said that it had completed the returning of 90 per cent of nine million videos and will launch on time. Easter on the BBC will be dominated by *The Missing Postman*, a two part comedy drama starring James Bolam and Alison Steadman. It will also see the airing of *Before They Were Famous*, a special hosted by Angus Deayton where celebrities are caught on film doing commercials and bit-parts before their careers took off. BBC2's cult comedy hit of the season looks like being *Sunnyside Farm*, an agricultural comedy described as "The Archers on acid" and starring Phil Daniels and Shooting Stars' George Daines - in real life Matt Lucas - as Britain's first transsexual farmer.

BBC1's schedule is heavy with fly-on-the-wall documentaries, led by Jonathan Dimbleby's four-year look at the handover of Hong Kong in *The Last Governor*. David Lister and Paul McCann

Robinson aims to swap Emerald Isle for top UN post

Mary Robinson yesterday killed off Irish hopes that she will seek a second term as president and dropped a strong hint that she wants a top United Nations human rights post.

Mrs Robinson, Ireland's first woman president, has broken new ground since her election in 1990 by taking the presidency out to ordinary people and using it to modernise Ireland's image abroad.

She told the Taoiseach, John Bruton, yesterday of her decision and made it known that she would be a willing candidate for the post of UN's Commissioner for Human Rights. The vacancy arose when the incumbent, Ayala Lasso, quit to become Ecuador's foreign minister.

The President will see out her term until the end of the year. But lobbying to secure her UN role could begin next week when the Taoiseach meets the Bill Clinton in Washington during St Patrick's Day celebrations.

Mrs Robinson's record as a human rights lawyer and frequent visitor to Third World countries give her strong credentials for such an appointment.

At home, her energetic contribution drew praise from all sides. The Taoiseach said she "probably deserves to be described as the best



Mary Robinson: Ground-breaking

President we ever had". He said she had "dissipated stereotypes" about the Irish and "reached out to the poor and to those who felt the political system didn't matter for them".

Mrs Robinson came to office just as Ireland achieved a new confidence. She has also been fiercely independent, and drew the wrath of the British Government when before the IRA ceasefire she met and shook hands with Gerry Adams in West Belfast. Alan Murdoch

Appeal bid for Nepalese boy

The attempt by a millionaire businessman to allow his Nepalese "son" to stay in Britain is going to the Appeal Court.

Last November a High Court judge upheld a decision by the Home Secretary Michael Howard to deport Jay Khadka, 20, who lives in with Richard Morley in his mansion in the Forest of Dean. The appeal may be heard within a few weeks.

Mr Morley said: "We are very pleased to have this hearing. It is in fact and proper that this case should be heard during the administration of the current government. They are the people responsible for this chaos."

Mr Morley made Jay his adopted heir after what he claims was a debt of honour over the young man's late father, Basu. He saved Mr Morley's life in 1984 after while on a trekking expedition.

Jay came to Britain six years ago and was brought up as an English gentleman. Mr Morley has been fighting to have him stay on compassionate grounds.

Lawrence award for good citizens

Philip Lawrence, the head teacher stabbed in the heart while trying to protect a pupil, was yesterday commemorated with the launch of an annual good citizenship award for young people who give their time to community projects.

His widow, Frances (pictured at the launch), the newsreader Trevor McDonald, and the Home Secretary Michael Howard joined together to invite applications from youngsters involved in race relations work, anti-crime and drugs schemes and other neighbourhood programmes.

Mr Howard said: "It is possible to take something positive and meaningful from this death of an exceptionally talented head teacher."

"We have a responsibility to teach every child the difference



between right and wrong. Young people who do good work should be recognised," he said.

Philip Lawrence died in December 1995 when he was stabbed by a teenager, Learco

Chindamo, outside St George's Catholic School, north-west London, as he tried to protect a pupil from a revenge attack.

After the conviction, Mrs Lawrence launched a "moral manifesto" against violence in society. Yesterday, she told young people at the launch in London: "I am sure you understand that I feel a little sad that my husband Philip is not here today."

"He would never have stood back from injustice, he would do everything he could to put it right. He was the strongest of men and the gentlest of men."

Cash prizes of up to £1,000 will be presented on the anniversary of Mr Lawrence's death. Applications for the Home Office awards, which are open to young people aged 11-20, close in September. Nicole Veash

briefing

POLLUTION

Gummer sets 2005 target to eliminate smogs

The Government's final version of its National Air Quality strategy was published yesterday after three months of consultation, setting maximum levels for eight different types of health-threatening pollution which should never be exceeded after 2005.

But there was a catch: half of these targets are only provisional with the Government proposing to make no final decision until 1999. The Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer, said the strategy would eliminate both summer and winter smogs.

Many of the curbs are already being implemented, largely as a result of European Union laws. But achieving the targets for oxides of nitrogen, ozone, particulates (dangerous, microscopic airborne specks) and sulphur dioxide by 2005 will probably require more.

Under the strategy, local councils in areas with bad air quality must club together to formulate action plans. There will also be regulations which allow fixed penalty fines, such as parking tickets, to be given to motorists whose cars fail exhaust emission checks when checked at the roadside.

The UK National Air Quality Strategy, available from the Stationery Office bookshops, £17.85. Nicholas Schoon

EARNINGS

Pay gap widens between regions

Campaigners say a survey on low pay proves that Britain is becoming an increasingly divided society.

The Low Pay Network claims in a report published today that the pay gap between workers in different regions has widened to more than £140 a week. Average earnings in Greater London were £455 a week, compared with £313 in Wales. And although average pay throughout the country was £351 last year, one in 10 manual male workers earned less than £175 a week, and one in 10 manual women employees less than £115, said the report.

Average earnings in the regions included £365 a week in the South-east, £330 in the North-west, £326 in the South-west, £325 in East Anglia, £324 in Scotland and the West Midlands and £315 in the North.

Peter Kelly, who co-wrote the report, said: "These findings reinforce the view that Britain is now a deeply divided society. While some workers continue to prosper, many others have been left to cope with the effects of our down-sized, casualised, flexible labour market."

HEALTH

Sailors steer clear of the dry life

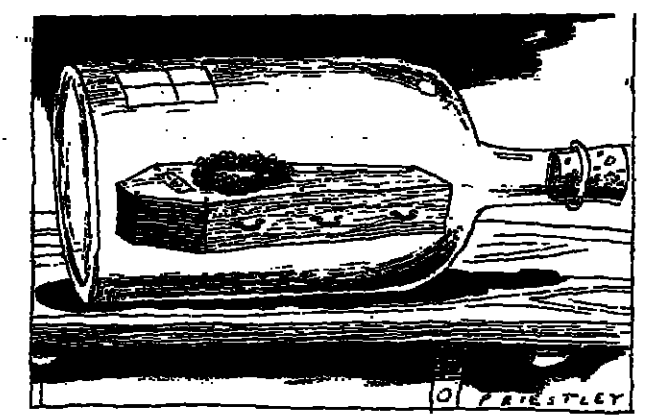
The drunken sailor is a not just a character from a sea shanty - he is alive and well and living in Scotland.

A survey which followed 15,000 Royal Navy submariners for 30 years, found that the sailors' death rate from cirrhosis of liver was more than twice the national average and was particularly high in Scotland. Moreover, four times as many of them died from alcoholic poisoning as men in the population as a whole. Not surprisingly, three times as many drowned.

Despite the incidence of cirrhosis, the submariners had a lower death rate than the male population as a whole because they got less skin cancer, leukaemia and respiratory disease.

The study, published today in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, looked at a group who trained in both diesel and nuclear submarines between 1960 and 1979, and followed them until 1989.

A Navy spokesman said: "We have a fairly sensible programme of education and guidance on alcohol. Although the death rate from cirrhosis was higher than average in the Navy in the 1970s, it evened out in the 1980s." Annabel Ferriman



CIVIL SERVICE

Agency tables scheme abandoned

The Government has abandoned plans to draw up league tables of the "next steps" agencies which now employ two-thirds of Whitehall staff. It had hoped to draw comparative tables of the 130 agencies, but they are so diverse the task has proved impossible.

However, in the second annual review of the performance of the agencies, eight have been identified as performing particularly badly, meeting only half or less of the targets set by them.

Among the badly performing list are Companies House, the Fire Service College, the NHS Pensions Agency, the Patent Office, and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. The best performing agencies, which met 80 per cent or more of their targets included the Central Office of Information and the UK Passport Agency.

Next Steps Agencies in Government, Review 1996, Stationery Office, £56

SCIENCE

Ending scrapie 'may be impossible'

Wiping out scrapie, the equivalent in sheep of "mad cow disease", could prove almost impossible in the UK and Europe. That is because it is caused by an infectious agent rather than genetic defects, British scientists have found.

If the disease was caused by genetic mutation, then it might prove possible to breed it out of flocks. But a comparison by a team from the Institute for Animal Health (IAH) in Edinburgh, of sheep from Australia and New Zealand - where no scrapie has been found for decades - with flocks from the UK found few significant differences in their genetic makeup.

Scientists had suggested that mutations of the PrP gene caused scrapie but the team found that the scrapie-free sheep from the Antipodes had the same mutations of the gene as the diseased British flocks.

The IAH concludes in today's *Nature* that the development of scrapie in sheep must require an additional factor, probably an infectious agent, making eradication in the UK and Europe very difficult. Charles Arthur

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Judge orders anorexic girl to be locked up

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

A High Court judge has broken new legal ground by ordering an anorexic teenager at risk of starving to death to be detained for treatment - by force if necessary.

The judge said he had "no doubt" that he had the power not only to direct the 16-year-

old girl to a clinic, but also to authorise the use of reasonable force to keep her there after hearing evidence of her eating disorder, subjection to sexual abuse and a suicide threat.

While the judge, Mr Justice Wall, was acting under the jurisdiction relating to children and young people, where a child's "best interests" are the dominant criteria, the ruling will

rekindle the debate over judges' increasing willingness to override the wishes of patients who refuse treatment.

The ruling was made last week in a private hearing in the High Court family division, but the judge gave permission for it to be reported because of the important principles involved.

The 16-year-old, who cannot be identified for legal reasons,

began worrying about her weight at 12 and became anorexic at 14. She had also been a victim of long-term sexual abuse by a brother. Her history of eating problems included vomiting, taking laxatives and absconding from clinics where she was being treated. On one occasion she threatened to commit suicide and had to be restrained from throwing herself off a balcony.

Last November, she was admitted to hospital after eating no more than a few slices of cucumber in the previous 10 days.

The judge said doctors had reported that the girl had the ability suddenly to stop eating and drinking, putting herself at risk of collapse and death within the following three to seven days. There was no doubt, Mr Justice Wall said, that it was in

the girl's best interests to be treated in the clinic. He was satisfied in addition that detention, using reasonable force if necessary, was an essential component of the treatment.

The case, brought by the girl's local authority although she is not in its care, may be of comfort to desperate parents faced with the trauma of an anorexic child who does not

want to get better. But the ruling will raise new fears about the increasing tendency of doctors to seek authority for their actions from the courts, and the preparedness of the courts to back them up.

While the focus has recently been on enforced Caesarean sections on unwilling pregnant women, the British Medical Association raised fresh fears

yesterday. A spokesman said: "We have general concerns about the use of reasonable force and how this is to be interpreted. In the past we have asked the Mental Health Commission to draw up guidelines to help professionals."

The BMA is in the process of considering new guidelines on children's consent to or refusal of treatment.



Unmasked: survivor of King's Cross fire goes before judge to claim damages for scars that will never heal



Louise Jury

He was the man in the mask, the King's Cross fire survivor so badly burned his face needed a shield against the world in order to heal.

Kwasi Afari Minta, now 43, endured a year in his plastic face and underwent innumerable skin grafts to repair the damage. He emerged bearing scars which will never heal.

His head is larger, carrying the fire-fused reminders of the night in November 1987 which

he will never forget. He takes shirts four sizes bigger than before. His hands are clumsy blocks of welded tissue and his mouth cannot form an O. His eyelids will not close.

"I am a different person now," he said yesterday as he appeared at the High Court in London to claim damages against London Regional Transport (LRT).

LRT admitted liability shortly after the London Underground tragedy in which 31 people died and dozens others

were injured at King's Cross station. It has paid out more than £4.5m in 110 claims of death, injury and property damage.

Bar one disputed claim, Mr Minta's is the last to be settled. The worst of the many badly-burned survivors, he is representing himself before Mr Justice Toulson. The hearing should begin in full today.

Outside the court after yesterday's brief opening, Mr Minta, of Putney, south-west London, told how his horrific injuries have completely changed

his life. No longer able to play the guitar or keyboards or sing (surgical tubes in his throat damaged that too), his career as a studio musician ended in the minutes a fireball engulfed him as he left the Piccadilly Line escalators.

Though he returned to the recording studio afterwards to finish work in progress, it was impossible. "I fell far short of being able to do it."

His marriage crumbled under the strain. "When [his then wife] came and saw me, she

couldn't handle it. We had to break up," he said.

He tried working as a minicab driver, but his appearance deterred passengers. Now he has re-trained at college in desktop publishing. "I just need to get something going," he said.

With a new wife Regina, and a son, Eugene, five, he has tried to re-build his life. But it is a very different one. "I don't want any public life. I feel uncomfortable with it. I would rather stay at home and guard

myself against the staring," he said.

For it is the staring that makes his new existence intolerable. "People laugh, they don't know what has happened to you. My life has been unbearable. If I had my own world, it would be better - a place where I don't have to meet people."

Walking down the road, he will notice children stop, then point and giggle. "I have never got used to that. It's very awkward. Do you vanish or what?"

Ghanaian-born Mr Minta did not know the extent of his injuries for a long time. In fact, he was so badly burned he did not even feel the pain for two days, he said.

After passers-by heroically tore the burning clothes from his body, it was impossible to exit from King's Cross station and he had to take another tube train to neighbouring Farringdon station to receive first aid.

He spent six months in Queen Mary's Hospital. Rochester, wearing the mask to keep his skin moist while his face was re-built. Only when he left the ward did he see his face in a mirror for the first time. "It was the worst thing on the earth."

Nearly 10 years on since the fire tragedy, it is no easier to bear his injuries now than it was when he first emerged from hospital.

"It has taken me almost 10 years to adjust to people," he said. "But people don't adjust to me. It is perpetual misery."

The world loses a stage as Globe is buried for ever

David Lister
Arts News Editor

The original site of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in south London is to remain buried and all archaeological excavations prevented on the advice of English Heritage, the government's advisory body on preserving the nation's heritage.

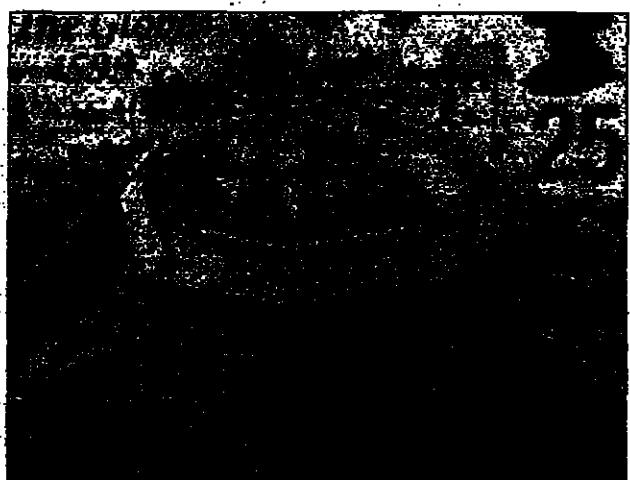
The empty building above the remains of the original Globe is to be converted into luxury flats.

The decision to stop further research on the Elizabethan theatre, the famous "Wooden O", will appal Shakespeare students and academics around the world.

Archaeologists and academics were planning excavations to determine the position, shape and size of the stage that Shakespeare worked on. This cannot now go ahead.

Mark Rylance, the artistic director of the nearby new Shakespeare Globe Theatre, the reconstruction of the original which will be opened by the Queen this summer, said yesterday he was stunned by the decision. He is writing to the Virginia Bottomley, the Heritage Secretary, who has rubber-stamped the decision, and John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment.

Though his theatre, modelled on the assumed look of the original Globe, employs acad-



Original Globe: Archaeological excavations are to stop

emics and archaeologists to continue research into the original Globe to determine more about the building, its stage and setting, neither he nor any of the academics was consulted.

Yesterday Zoe Wanamaker, the award-winning actress and daughter of the late American director Sam Wanamaker, who devoted much of his life to seeing the new Globe built, was close to tears as she stood outside the fenced off site of the original Globe, surrounded by historians, academics and archaeologists who also wanted to express their dismay publicly.

The decision by English Heritage to refuse permission for

excavations was taken at the end of last year, but the organisation, headed by Sir Jocelyn Stevens, did not publicise it. Now Southwark borough council, acting on English Heritage's advice, has given planning permission to a private property company to convert the empty Grade 2 listed building, Anchor Terrace, that stands above the original Globe, into luxury flats.

Acting on English Heritage advice, Southwark refers in its planning permission to "the permanent burial and commemoration" of the Globe.

The end to excavations and research into the theatre where Shakespeare worked and his

plays were performed will have resonances far beyond Britain.

Ms Wanamaker said: "This is a complete shock. Virginia Bottomley should be very embarrassed by this. Archaeologists, academics, all of us should be furious. This is a bureaucratic decision which has slipped under the net without anyone really noticing. It's a betrayal of our heritage. And there's no real reason for it."

Mr Rylance added: "English Heritage has recommended that the original site of the Globe Theatre be buried permanently. It seems an odd way to preserve the heritage. What's buried down there is like oil or gold to us. The knowledge down there is like gold. The Globe is a unique source of information."

"We want to do keyhole surgery through the basement of Anchor Terrace by drilling down. We wouldn't disturb anything."

A spokeswoman for English Heritage said yesterday: "We are not saying the remains should be buried permanently. The remains are extremely fragile to excavate and they lie beneath a listed building which would require demolition. This does not mean they could not be excavated at a future time when there are improved techniques."

Mr Rylance and his advisers deny that further excavations would mean demolishing the building above.

Cabbies to sell gift of the gab

Matthew Brace

"Ere, guv'nor, have you heard the one about the German electronics company, London cabbies and mobile phones?" It is the latest stunt in an advertising-mad world and it is coming to the back seat of a black cab near you.

Siemens, the German electronics company, plans to pay London's cabbies to use their notorious gift of the gab to promote its latest model of mobile phone.

About 100 cabbies will be given a day's training on Friday in

the art of dropping information about the firm's latest phone into conversation. They are then due to start their sales pitch on Monday for a four-week trial, earning more than £50 a week.

The scheme, known in the business as "advertising", could be extended across the UK to other products if it proves successful.

A spokesman for Siemens' advertising agency, Impact FCA, said yesterday: "This is just a fun way of getting to the consumer. Cab drivers are considered friendly and already have a good banter and rapport with their passengers."

"If a conversation is already going, the driver could say something like, 'Did you see the football last night? Well, I missed it, but I kept in touch with the score by phoning my wife for updates on my mobile phone'," he said. The driver would be expected to make it clear that he was getting paid to endorse the product.

The driver would then impress his fare with facts and figures available about the Siemens phone, and might even hand a model through the glass partition to show passengers.

He said the drivers would not

be receiving commission payments if their fares then bought mobile phones.

However, the plan could well run into opposition from the Metropolitan Police's Public Carriage Office, which governs London's taxi trade.

Impact FCA said it was "in negotiations" with the Public Carriage Office about the proposal and was confident it would be given the go-ahead.

A Metropolitan Police spokesman said no formal application had been received and added drivers were not allowed to act as agents for advertisers.

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Vouchers to force sale of homes for elderly

Scheme will turn councils into care purchasers

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Vouchers could be used as part of the Government's plans for forcing local authorities to sell off their old people's homes in the most radical shake-up of social services for 25 years, Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health said yesterday.

Attacked as "privatising grannies" by hostile Labour MPs, and "dogma gone mad" by carers groups, yesterday's White Paper is the beginning of a drive to transform local authorities into purchasers not providers of care.

Defending his plans Mr Dorrell said vouchers for the elderly were being tried in Labour-controlled Bradford and he accused Chris Smith, Labour's Health spokesman, of "shooting his own supporters in the back".

The White Paper said the Government wished to encourage experimentation with other ways of reinforcing people's right to influence their choice of residential or nursing home. "Some authorities are looking at voucher schemes as a way of extending and facilitating this right to choice. The Government intends to ensure that there are no legal obstacles to the use of vouchers in this way."

The White Paper also heralded tougher guidelines to stop children being allowed out of children's homes following complaints that some have in-

dulged in drinking and under-age sex.

The White Paper says the Government stands ready to act, either by issuing new guidance or changing the law if there is seen to be a further need to tip the balance more firmly in favour of adults. Social workers will also need to undergo further training if they wish to work with children.

The old people's homes sell-off was attacked by Mr Smith as "ideologically imposed". He said it would be cancelled by an incoming Labour government and Labour would legislate to establish a social services council to oversee standards of care.

Some 76,000 people living in 2,547 homes in England and Wales are likely to be affected. In future local authorities will only be able to provide care themselves if they can prove the private or voluntary sector cannot meet such needs. The White Paper also warns that it is the responsibility of individuals to plan to meet their own needs and that family and friends should be willing to act as carers.

It aims to drive down the cost of social services, which in the 10 years to 1994-5 saw spending rise 75 per cent in real terms. A survey commissioned recently by Mr Dorrell found that the average cost of a week's residential care in a council home in 1994-95 was £283, compared to £246 in a voluntary or private sector home.

A social services reform Bill would also bring in an independent regulation of standards by local health and social services working together.

While independent care homes welcomed the move, unions and charities described it as "dogma gone mad", saying it signalled an end to the public service ethos. And, embarrassingly for the Government, the first of its programme of reviews of social services departments published today found that Stockport social services was "doing well" and providing "high quality services to meet the needs of very vulnerable people".

Evaluation of Stockport's services by the Audit Commission and the Department of Health showed that three out of four people were happy with them. "Not only does the idea of public service still exist, but people seem to like it."

Barry Hassell, chief executive of the Independent Health Association, said the paper was a "positive move for consumers taxpayers and providers alike".

Unison's national officer, John Findlay, said: "Worryingly, these proposals open the door to exploitation of people in need of a range of home care support, including meals-on-wheels, by faceless multinational companies who will never be able to replicate the attention and care that these popular local services provide."



Twilight zone: Old people's homes are the latest target of the Government's privatisation drive

Photograph: Brian Harris

Wigan chief admits false transfer plan

Peter Greenhalgh

Jack Robinson, chairman of Wigan rugby league club, yesterday confirmed that he had proposed setting up a fictitious transfer deal in a scheme to win damages from a local newspaper in a libel action.

He told Bolton Crown Court that in a telephone conversation with Alfred Davies, chief executive of Leeds rugby league club, he had proposed that Leeds should supply him with letters purporting to show that it had withdrawn an offer to buy Neil Cowie, the international forward, after an unfavourable article in the local *Wigan Observer* newspaper.

The letters would be used in an action for damages against the newspaper, the proceeds of which he offered to share between the two clubs, even though transfer negotiations had never taken place.

Mr Robinson, 55, of Wigan has denied attempting to pervert the course of justice. He told the court he was acting on behalf of another director, John Martin, when he put the fake transfer proposal to Mr Davies, and he was always confident that Mr Davies would reject the proposal - which he did.

Mr Robinson told the jury that in February last year Wigan rugby league team had been surprisingly beaten by Salford in a Challenge Cup match. He gave

an interview to the *Wigan Observer* sports editor, Neil Barker, in which he criticised the fact players had been allowed to take a week's holiday in Tenerife immediately prior to the game.

This was followed by a report of Wigan players being involved in a "drunken binge" in the Tenerife hotel. The report mistakenly stated that one player involved was Neil Cowie. In fact, Cowie, son-in-law of John Martin, the Wigan director, was skiing in Scotland at that time.

Mr Robinson said Mr Martin had initiated a libel action against the newspaper without Cowie's knowledge, the player being on tour in Fiji.

In a letter to the newspaper, Mr Martin's solicitors claimed that Leeds had pulled out of a £150,000 transfer deal for Cowie as a result of the "drunken" report. Mr Robinson said Mr Martin had asked him to approach Mr Davies to provide material to support the fake transfer claim and he had agreed to do so though he was confident Mr Davies would reject the proposal.

He said he had agreed to make the approach because he was keen to retain Mr Martin's financial support of the club at that time.

Since then, there had been a boardroom split over the future of the Wigan ground, Central Park, and Mr Martin is no longer a director, he said.

The case continues.

Tiny machines will be able to build themselves

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

How do you build a micro-machine whose components are thousands of times smaller than a pinhead? The answer, according to American scientists, is that you don't - you let them build themselves.

Sometime in the new millennium, such machines could be injected into people to clean up their blood, like the miniaturised submarine seeking out a blood clot in the 1960s film *Fantastic Voyage*, or to clear harmful chemicals.

Now, using techniques borrowed from biology, a team at Harvard University in Massachusetts has taken the first step towards such self-assembling machines, by mixing together different parts with the required shape, adding some photosensitive glue, and mixing them until the shape they wanted appeared. A beam of ultraviolet light then set the glue.

With a market value estimated at £40bn in the next 10 years, "nanotechnology" is attracting huge investment.

But teams trying to make such systems - such as gears the

size of pollen grains and electric motors smaller than a pinhead - have previously faced the same problem: it is very difficult to put the pieces together without dropping them. "In most fabrication, you do things by fixing them in place - welding or screwing them to something. They're systems which are metastable," said George Whitesides of Harvard's chemistry department.

His team, however, decided to try using the assembly techniques of the human cell - the fact that certain shapes fit together, even at the molecular level, and that liquids and bubbles can bring surfaces into contact. Early experiments in a six-month project, reported today in the science journal *Nature*, produced millimetre-sized plastic components. Now, the team aims to make smaller, more complex machines which could be used to manufacture microelectronic and mechanical systems, he said. That, though, could take 10 years.

One micro-engineered product already in use is a device in car airbags that detects deceleration when a crash is imminent, and triggers inflation.

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6
politicsDAVID
AaronovitchSpring comes to
the Tarquins

It is Spring here at the heart of Empire. The sun is reflected from the white towers and buttresses of Westminster Abbey, or trapped in the carved crevices of the decorations and gargoyles on the Houses of Parliament. On College Green the bravest, ugliest tourists have shed their overcoats and donned shorts. In Great Peter Street the tall, shabby-genteel Edwardian blocks of flats are sporting window-boxes of daffodils and crocuses. A bush of yellow forsythia peeks through the newly painted black railings that line the Queen Anne terrace of Lord North Street.

But what season is it in the building that lies – round the corner – in the shadow of the imposing baroque of St John's, Smith Square? Give me a moment to put my change and keys into a little polythene bag and pass through the metal detectors just inside the doors. Wait, while Venetia or Cordelia in the sky-blue cardigan and Hermes scarf, checks my credentials and hands me a sticky badge, while pin-striped, spotty Tarquin thrusts a bundle of press releases into my hand.

Here I am, inside a dark theatre. At the back is a projection and lighting booth, manned by three more Tarquins. Round the walls are posters proclaiming the dangers of electing a Labour government. Extra Venetias and Tarquins appear at intervals along these walls or sit, singly, in various parts of the room. Music (Vivaldi perhaps) enters from some hidden source.

Near the front, seven or eight of Britain's finest political correspondents and editors huddle together for companionship. To their side and behind, watching them with zoological interest, is the diminutive (but perfect) Alan Duncan, MP for Rutland – seconded for special election-time duties to the office of the Chairman of the Conservative Party.

Who now enters, accompanied by the straight, stiff figure of the President of the Board of Trade, Ian Lang. Mr Lang sat on a ramrod when young, and carries it still within – at once a handicap and a source of inner strength.

But it is Dr Mawhinney who captures the eye. Just a few weeks ago he seemed to be bearing the sins of his party Dorian Gray style, in his face. That yellow skin, those darting fierce but frightened eyes, that odd, agonised revealing of the teeth – which might give a name to a new verb, to Mawhinney: to smile a ghastly smile.

Today – to my surprise – that death's head grin is gone. The smile is almost gentle, Mawhinney's adoration of the many sins of Labour is perfunctory and lacking in malice. He takes and evades questions with a resigned air, as if to say "you are journalists and must ask: I am a politician and must not answer. It is in our nature."

Though the ostensible purpose of the event is to unveil an unflattering letter sent by Mr President Lang to Mr Padraig Flynn – Irishman and Euro-Commissioner – no one (least of all Dr Mawhinney) is interested in the new threat to Britain's jobs posed by devils on the Continent. But there is a job to be done, and tomorrow Dr Mawhinney will be here with Peter Lilley, and the day after that with someone else.

Outside, beyond the metal detectors, men are digging up the road in Lord North Street. High up in the Great Peter Street flats an old lady with untidy hair leans out of her fifth-floor window and waters her ivy. A gaggle of schoolchildren passes down Millbank on their way to the Abbey. As Dr Mawhinney knows, Spring comes, life goes on – and governments fall.



Pipe dreamers: Members of the Lords and Commons Pipe and Cigar Smokers' Club preparing to light up outside Westminster yesterday in defiance of the campaign urging smokers to quit on No Smoking Day. Photograph: Edward Sykes

Blair cleared over charge of
involvement in fundraising

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, has rejected a complaint from a backbench Tory MP that Tony Blair, the Labour leader, was personally involved in fundraising for his office expenses.

The complaint, by David Shaw, MP for Dover, centred on

a "blind" trust set up by the Labour Party to raise money from large-scale donors on the basis that their names would not be known to Mr Blair or any other senior party figures.

Mr Shaw argued that the trust was not "blind" in that Mr Blair had personally been trying to raise money by meeting potential donors at meals. He said that the identity of donors

was known to the Labour leader.

However, yesterday, in a letter to Mr Shaw, Sir Gordon said that Mr Shaw's evidence "consisted only of newspaper or hearsay reports of what has allegedly been said to journalists". He concluded that "unless direct evidence is provided to support the allegation that Mr Blair has been personally involved in fundraising for the Labour Party's Office Fund", he would tell the Commons Committee of Standards and Privileges that there was no case to answer.

Sir Gordon also took the unusual step of criticising the editor of the *Sunday Times*, John Witherow, who alleged, in an editorial last Sunday, that he was "prevaricating" over the investigation. Sir Gordon denies this and says "there is no truth in the suggestion that I failed to inform the committee of the provisional advice I had given to Mr

Blair's office [about the blind trust]" or that he was criticised by the committee for having failed to provide the advice. Sir Gordon has asked the newspaper "to consider a correction". He says, however, that the rules on contributions to the administrative expenses of both government and Opposition frontbenchers needs "to be codified".

The Labour campaign spokesman Brian Wilson welcomed the decision: "We never had any doubt that this would be the outcome. The whole operation was a smear job by Mr Shaw, licensed by Tory Central Office."

Last Tuesday, Mr Shaw attempted to keep the issue going by tabling a further set of complaints to Sir Gordon about similar trusts run by the offices of the Labour frontbenchers John Prescott, Margaret Beckett, Gordon Brown and Robin Cook.

MPs seek
tax on car
parks out
of town

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

MPs have called for a tax on out-of-town car parking spaces to stop shoppers deserting traditional town centres for greenfield superstores.

Several pressure groups had proposed such a tax, which could raise hundreds of millions of pounds a year. But to have an all-party House of Commons select committee back the idea gives it a new respectability.

Neither of the main parties would contemplate such a tax in the run-up to the election. But the recommendation from the Environment Select Committee in its latest report on shopping centres puts it firmly on the agenda after polling day.

The MPs said: "We recommend that the Government consider either introducing a levy or allowing local authorities to assess car parks for business rates." At present they are not rated, in or out of town.

The committee chairman, Andrew Bennett, said there was a wide gap between car parking charges in out-of-town shopping and leisure centres and those in the town centre. "When I go into the middle of Stockport to shop it costs me 80p while if I use the new out-of-town John Lewis store at Cheshire its free," he said.

Many town centre car parks were owned by local councils and the charges had become an important source of revenues. "It's not easy for a cash-strapped council to cut those charges to compete with out-of-town developments."

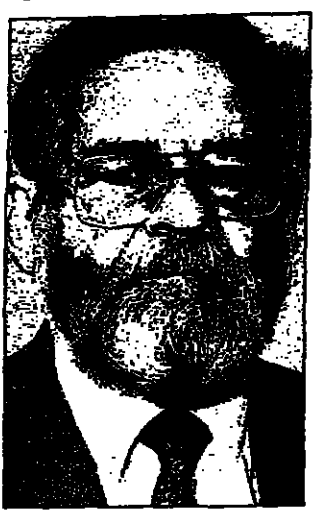
The tax would be paid by the owner or operator of the out-of-town car park, who could choose whether or not to pass it on to customers in higher parking charges. It would apply to developments already built as well as all future ones, covering the hundreds of thousands of out-of-town car parking spaces which have sprung up in the past 20 years. The aim would be to encourage more use of public transport and town centre facilities and discourage the use of greenfield sites which is eating away at the countryside and encouraging more and longer car journeys.

The MPs' recommendation opens a debate about the level of tax, whether councils or central government should collect it, and exactly what kind and lo-

cation – edge or out-of-town developments – it should apply to.

The growth in big out-of-town shopping centres has slowed, because the Government has changed planning policies to oppose them and because so much has already been built that some retailers are approaching saturation point in some areas. None the less, there are dozens which have been granted planning permission by local councils but not yet built.

But Mr Bennett said leisure developments such as multiplex cinemas and bowling alleys were now rapidly expanding out of town. "These represent the latest threat to existing town centres as places where people not only shop but live, work and relax," he said. He was delighted that John Gummer, the



Andrew Bennett: Wide gap between car park charges

Secretary of State for the Environment, recently rejected Virgin's plans for a 10-screen cinema at an out-of-town site near Eastleigh in Hampshire.

The MPs also called for tax relief on companies' contributions towards approved town centre improvement plans.

Their report was welcomed by the Civic Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

Tony Burton, for the council, said: "If we're to learn anything from the environmental damage caused by out-of-town shopping, it is that stronger carrots and sticks are needed to steer development into towns and cities where it can contribute towards urban renewal and slow the growth in traffic."

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Labour's
glitterati
party in
style

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Labour's great and glamorous gathered at the Hilton Hotel in London last night for a £500-a-head fundraising dinner, which was expected to raise up to a quarter of a million pounds for the party's election effort.

Among the 450 guests who paid to attend the function were Bianca Jagger, Sinéad Cusack, and Lord Attenborough. Mehryn Bragg, a regular at such events, was also there along with the DJ Simon Mayo, comedian Stephen Fry and actor Paul McGann. A further 120 officials, MPs and donors dined at the party's expense.

The dinner was the fifth such annual event held by Labour, and was the biggest so far. Last year's raised £200,000 after Eric Cantona's football shirt was auctioned for £17,000.

Both Tony Blair and John Prescott were scheduled to make speeches, while Richard Wilson, star of BBC's *One Foot in the Grave*, hosted an auction. Mr Blair's wife, Cherie, and Mr Prescott's wife, Pauline, were both at the dinner.

Despite Tony Blair's recent attempts to distance himself from the "luvvie" fraternity, the turnout was better than ever.

Among the guests from business were Wahid Ali, head of the television company Planet 24, Bill Hamilton, director of public affairs for Safeway and Alec Reed, founder of Reed Personnel Services.

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Blithe spirit: Sir Patrick with the Prime Minister during a 1994 visit to Northern Ireland, where the Secretary of State spent 'the best five years' of his career

Mayhew bows out ducking tough questions

Alan Murdoch
Dublin

Declaring his time as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland "the five best-spent years of my career", Sir Patrick Mayhew yesterday glossed over criticism of his handling of opportunities presented by the peace process.

Irish Conference meeting with Irish ministers if he had been a failure, he said: "It is for other people and not for me to decide about those matters."

Sir Patrick recalled that he had asked to be put in the post and was "very glad" he had been given it. He added: "Now, nearly five years later I am just as glad that I was given the chance. No-

body takes on this kind of thing and expects to be able to pat himself on the back."

He hoped he had helped the people of Ireland as a whole to "come to terms with their ancient history, to cease to look back and to look forward". Then Sir Patrick bade farewell just as questions began getting tougher on how his government

had missed the chances presented by the 1994 ceasefires.

It had been a rocky Anglo-Irish marriage with Dublin negotiators frequently convinced that he felt the Irish race was somehow made up solely of Unionists. But that was all forgotten yesterday. Before leaving, Irish ministers presented him with essays on Cork, where

he had Protestant Ascendancy ancestors, a book of photos of Irish antiquities and a bottle of 40-year-old Middleton Very Rare whiskey.

The Dublin meeting dealt with Dublin's concerns over British handling of the North report on the marching season, security issues and the detention of Róisín McAliskey.

First shots fired in dirty war for Tory leadership

Anthony Bevir
Political Editor

A "dirty war" for the Conservative leadership erupted yesterday after the *Express* carried a front-page report alleging that Baroness Thatcher had joined a secret campaign to back Michael Portillo.

The report was later repudiated by Julian Sermour, "director" of Lady Thatcher's private office, who said it was "malicious nonsense and entirely without foundation".

It had been alleged that staff in Lady Thatcher's office had circulated a dossier containing pen portraits of Conservative election candidates, "to help the Defence Secretary canvass support". John Whittingdale, Conservative MP for Colchester South and Maldon, one of Lady Thatcher's former aides and the alleged link between her and the Portillo campaign, said: "This story is a total fabrication and utterly without foundation."

"It is clearly designed to cause damage to Lady Thatcher, Michael Portillo and to the Conservative Party. Lady Thatcher's office denied there was any truth in it yesterday, and I am astonished that the *Express* should see fit to print it, having been told it was untrue."

It has been known for some years that Lady Thatcher was a great admirer of Mr Portillo, and that he would be her current favourite in any contest for the succession to John Major.

But the current leadership campaign has to stay underground because it depends on an inbuilt assumption - widely shared among some contenders - that the Conservatives are heading for election defeat on 1 May.

As the letter from the former leader's office said yesterday: "Lady Thatcher gives her full support to the Prime Minister and will work for victory by the Conservative Party at the forthcoming general election."

But the fact that the covert campaign is being fought is as evident from the dirty tricks as it is from the jockeying for position by potential contenders.

A report in yesterday's *Eastern Daily Press*, the regional newspaper that serves Gillian Shephard's Norfolk South-West constituency, repudiated a weekend newspaper report that she had decided not to stand in a leadership contest because she wanted to spend more time with her family.

"Friends of the Norfolk MP yesterday poured scorn on a Westminster rumour that she

had ruled herself out of standing for the Conservative leadership," the *Eastern Daily Press* political editor reported.

Using the Westminster code that is commonly used to disguise the person in question, the report added: "Sources close to the SW Norfolk MP said yesterday that the [weekend] article seemed to have something to do with furthering the cause of the 35-year-old Welsh Secretary [William Hague]."

The only contender who has so far stood against John Major for the leadership, John Redwood, yesterday maintained his remorseless pace for the next challenge with a speech in which he washed his hands of the current crisis over the Meat Hygiene Service and the state of the country's abattoirs.

"As a minister," Mr Redwood said, "I unsuccessfully opposed the birth of the national Meat Hygiene Service."

"I thought it better to leave the responsibility with the local authorities."

"They are responsible for food safety outside the abattoir, why not let them remain responsible for the abattoirs as well? Again, the new national service has proved to be both dearer and less effective than advertised at the time."

Major's manifesto will attack unions

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Tough curbs on trade unions, allowing customers of privatised utilities to sue for loss of service, are to be included in the Tory election manifesto, Ian Lang, the President of the Board of Trade, said yesterday.

The proposals, some of the toughest employment legislation since the Second World War, provoked outrage among trades unions and raised doubts among some Tory supporters.

Senior Tory sources said the Government had decided to press ahead with the plans, outlined in a Green Paper last year, which proposed that unions could be stripped of immunity from legal action if a court decided the effects of the strike were "disproportionate or excessive".

The notice period for strikes could be doubled to 14 days after ballots in which a majority of those entitled to vote would be required to make the strike legal.

The TUC attacked the proposals as "vindictive and small-minded". It could leave unions open to injunctions and fines for contempt of court with sequestration of assets.

The Green Paper made it clear that strikes last year affecting the fire service, London Underground and the postal service would have come within the scope of the anti-strike measures.

Tony Blair this week told the unions that "the basic trade union laws of the 1980s will not be repealed - there will be no return to no-ballot strikes, flying pickets or secondary action or any of the rest of it". But Labour will attack the next wave of Tory employment laws as a step too far.

Last night, Labour reinforced that message at its gala dinner in London. "We have changed. And it simply defies logic to think that we would go through such radical change in creating new Labour, merely to slip back if we win."

Describing himself as an

"eternal warrior" against complacency, Mr Blair told colleagues not to take victory for granted. And he assured businessmen at the dinner that Labour would not go "back to the old ways" in government.

Meanwhile, Mr Lang yesterday wrote to the European Social Affairs Commissioner, Pádraig Flynn, to protest against a threat to tighten the EU rules on redundancy, following the decision by Renault to close its plant in Belgium.

Mr Flynn attacked the threatened closure and told the European Parliament that there was a balance to be struck between companies' economic needs and the rights of the workers.

But in a clear appeal to Tory Euro-sceptics, Mr Lang attacked the plan to extend workers' rights. "It is in the interests of all of us in Europe that you look for ways to remove restrictions on employment, rather than to increase them," Mr Lang said.

Speaker's latest ruling: no bleeping in the House

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Speaker of the Commons, Betty Boothroyd, yesterday acted to stop the intrusion of message pagers in the chamber of the House.

She intervened to stop Labour MPs jumping to the messages sent them by party spin doctors.

Miss Boothroyd told MPs that she could not object to "an instrument that vibrates" but she did not want the curse of modern living, the bleeper, going off in the middle of Prime Minister's questions.

She warned MPs that anyone reading a message from one of the gadgets would be told to

resume their seat immediately. Although her ruling falls short of a complete ban on MPs' pagers in the Commons, it is intended to draw a line under their use.

It follows the outrage caused when Brian Wilson, a Labour MP and a senior member of Peter Mandelson's campaign team, appeared to be reading a pager message at the Despatch Box, when he intervened on Tuesday to protest against a Tory MP for failing to declare an interest at Prime Minister's questions.

Conservative MPs accused Mr Wilson of responding to the message from Labour's spin doctors, who were watching the session on television, and

spotted an opportunity to embarrass the Government. With MPs on both sides being tightly controlled by the spin doctors, the use of the pager raised the prospect of MPs using the devices to improve their verbal jousting across the chamber.

Miss Boothroyd's ruling means that in future, MPs will have to return to the tried and trusted system of sending and receiving messages on paper, if they wish to read them in public.

But MPs may be well advised to play safe by leaving their pagers where they are supposed to hang their hats, and their swords, in the members' cloakroom.

Prison ship defended

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

Ann Widdecombe, the Prisons Minister, yesterday defended the arrival of Britain's first floating jail, which is due to be moored off the Dorset coast this morning, and predicted that local residents would eventually grow attached to it.

So far the citizens of Portland, where the floating prison will be based, have been anything but enthusiastic, and the local council has refused it planning permission. The Prison Service is appealing to the Department of the Environment next Thursday to over-ride the council.

Ms Widdecombe said yesterday: "I do understand why it is that people sometimes get

concerned about having prisons permanently near them, though oddly enough when we then try to close down the prison, they always resist it."

"If we do manage to get that ship up and running, the population which has resisted it arriving will resist it when we say we don't need it any more."

HM Prison Wear, formerly the *Resolution*, has been shipped over from New York as an emergency measure to deal with the jail over-crowding crisis.

The Prison Service director general, Richard Tilt, said that if the appeal for the ship to be moored at Portland failed, the service had identified other potential sites where it could go, subject to planning approval. He declined to say where.

Speaking at the Prison Governors' Association annual meeting in Buxton, Derbyshire, Ms Widdecombe rejected suggestions that the spiralling jail population constituted a crisis.

The association said it was disappointed by Ms Widdecombe's speech. "We are deeply disturbed by her belief that a rising prison population is a factor in reducing crime rates. Here is a simplistic and potentially damaging approach to the management of criminal justice," a PGA statement said.

Last Friday, the prison population in England and Wales stood at 59,156, just a little short of the total capacity of 60,013. The jails are expected to be full in about two weeks.

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news

Prospects for black barristers get worse

Lawyers attack 'appalling level of unequal treatment'

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

Urgent action to stamp out discrimination against aspiring black barristers was called for yesterday in the wake of a sharp increase in the failure rate of the Bar examination.

In an analysis of pass rates over the past four years, the Society of Black Lawyers said the disparity between blacks and whites represented "an appalling level of unequal treatment". Latest figures for the Bar's "clearing house" scheme, for matching would-be pupil barristers to chambers, likewise showed a pattern of continuing racial discrimination, the society said.

A breakdown of pass rates at the Inns of Court School of Law – until this autumn the monopoly provider of the Bar finals course – shows failure



rates for ethnic minority students of 29.9 per cent in 1992-93, 30.4 in 1993, 25.4 in 1994-95 and 42.1 in 1995-96, almost double the previous year.

While the failure rate for white candidates also almost



Colour Bar? Little has improved since the Barrow report, with the ranks of judges and barristers remaining largely white, with few exceptions such as Patricia Scotland (top), barrister and member of the Millennium Commission; and Lord Taylor (bottom), barrister and member of the Millennium Commission. Main photograph: Kevin Lamarque

doubled from 10.2 per cent in 1994-95 to 18.9 per cent in 1995-96. Peter Herbert, the society's chairman, said: "This has a far more dramatic effect on black students because we haven't got the numbers there,

and the failure rate is still double for black people."

Following the damning 1994 Barrow report into racism at the school, which found that ethnic minority students felt "isolated, inadequate and socially and fi-

nancially handicapped", the former governing body, the Council for Legal Education, promised to make an extra £500,000 available, improve tutor-student ratios and provide extra teaching space. It remains

to be seen whether the opening up of the course to other universities and law schools in September will make a difference.

Mr Herbert claimed black students had been receiving less favourable treatment in

terms of the provision of any extra help that might be needed, contributing to loss of morale. He said he suspected that examiners expected answers that could favour candidates whose first language was English, while

black students continued to believe they were identifiable to markers despite an anonymous numbering system. Ethnic minority students were also likely to suffer in oral tests, where marking was subjective.

The Bar's clearing house scheme for pupils, which places almost 70 per cent of pupil barristers, showed a pattern of continuing racial discrimination at the Bar, Mr Herbert said.

For 1995-96, there were 1,378 applications from whites, who secured a total of 839 offers, accepting a total of 447. Asians made 143 applications, secured 57 offers and accepted 35. For those of African or Caribbean origin, 97 applications produced 21 offers, of which 15 were accepted. The society has called on the Bar Council to make equality of treatment a priority for the coming year.

The chairman of the council's race relations committee, Lincoln Crawford, who is black, said: "I am absolutely determined to get to the heart of this. The Barrow inquiry found no firm evidence of discrimination, but nothing has changed."

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Gulf veterans harassed over health claims

Ian Barrett

Earl Howe, the Defence Minister, has been told that Gulf war veterans have been intimidated and followed home by plainclothes investigators.

The veterans, campaigning over Gulf war syndrome, believe they are being harassed as "subversives" by officials because of their attempts to find out what happened to them in the war.

One of those who has been targeted is Angus Parker, who served as a technician for a secret Gulf unit working for scientists from Forton Down, the chemical defence establishment.

Mr Parker, who is now showing the symptoms of Gulf war syndrome, tipped off the Commons Defence Select Committee about the work of his unit.

Soon afterwards, he visited London to be assessed by Army doctors. As he left the Henry VIII hotel, Bayswater, on the morning of 5 February, he was followed into a nearby café by a man in a suit.

The man, who knew Mr Parker was going for a medical, asked the veteran whether he intended to make any more information public, and refused to identify himself.

An argument ensued and the interrogator left. Then 10 days later, he reappeared, fol-

lowing Mr Parker outside his home in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Mr Parker, who suffers from respiratory problems, unsuccessfully tried to chase the man, who had a military-style haircut and a southern accent.

Earl Howe has agreed to meet Mr Parker at Westminster today, when the matter will be discussed along with other grievances regarding Gulf war syndrome. "We are seeking medical recognition of our condition and we are being tarred with the same brush as subversives," said Mr Parker. "We are fine upstanding members of society, willing to fight and die for our country, and look what is happening to us."

Dr David Clark, Labour's defence spokesman, said: "I am alarmed that the Gulf vets are being harassed in such a frightening manner. It appears that the Government are trying to hide something even now. Instead of harassing these people, the Government ought to help them find out what's wrong with them."

Dr Clark has also been given details of the alleged harassment of a former Army private from North Wales. The man claims that he was threatened by a group of men who would not identify themselves but knew of his campaign for compensation for sick Gulf troops.

DAILY POEM

Song

By Christina Rossetti

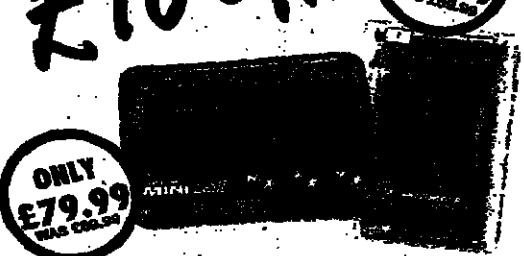
When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Happy I may remember
And happy may forget.

"Song" is one of five works by Christina Rossetti in *Victorian Love Poems*, edited by A. Norman Jeffares (Kyle Cathie, £8.99). This new anthology covers neglected writers as well as all the familiar names, while its inclusive definition of "Victorian" verse brings in literary figures as diverse as John Clare and James Joyce.

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سكنا من الأصل

Cash to train jobless siphoned off in frauds

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

Fraudulent claims for funding phantom students by unscrupulous training companies have contributed to £18m of mispent government funds in the last two years, a public spending body revealed yesterday.

The Public Accounts Committee condemned as "deplorable" evidence that money for training schemes to help jobless people back to work had been irregularly siphoned off by private training firms.

Citing cases in which companies claimed funding for non-existent students using forged qualification certificates, or for real students who had not yet qualified, the committee voiced concern that the risk remained of public money being wrongly paid out - despite attempts to clamp down.

Although the Department for Education and Employment, which funds work training, estimated it had reduced incorrect and uncertain payments from £9.4m in 1994-95 to £8.6m last year, the committee said the figure was still "too high and called for action to cut it further."

It also urged the DFEE to speed up its investigation of the

75 cases of suspected and alleged false claims for training funding logged since 1995. So far, only 41 have been investigated, and just one of those referred to the police.

Government funding for work training programmes reaches training providers - which include private firms - local authorities and voluntary bodies, via 76 training and enterprise councils (local companies which contract out government training work).

In claim funding, training providers have to give TECs records of trainees' attendance and photocopies of certificates proving they have gained National Vocational Qualifications. However, TECs are allowed to claim money back from the DFEE up to four months before they receive the providers' evidence, to help cash flow.

The DFEE acknowledged the system was at risk of abuse by providers, but told the Public Accounts Committee that experience had shown only 5 per cent of claims needed to be adjusted. In a system involving some 5,000 training providers in 200,000 training locations, it was "difficult to prevent individuals who wished to perpetuate irregularities from doing so," the department said.

In one case, the DFEE overpaid Cumbria TEC by £150,000 after a training provider allegedly claimed for trainees who had never been on a training programme. In another example, County Durham TEC was overpaid £231,000 after another provider submitted allegedly forged certificates. Two people face trial later this year in connection with the case.

Out of about 130 awarding bodies offering National Vocational Qualifications, the awards taken by trainees on government schemes, only one provided TECs with lists of people who had been awarded certificates, allowing them to cross-check the names. The committee called on the DFEE to ensure all major awarding bodies did the same.



Noteworthy: The saxophonist Holly Slater, 1996 Young Jazz Musician of the Year, playing at Ronnie Scott's yesterday

Photograph: Andrew Buerman

Blood service chiefs could face charges

Alan Murdoch
Dublin

Irish blood transfusion authorities could face criminal charges following the report of a tribunal of inquiry which found that they continued providing blood plasma to patients long after they were told it was contaminated with the hepatitis C virus.

Test results sent to Dublin in 1991 by the Middlesex Hospital in London, showed that blood products provided to patients by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service Board (IBTSB) were contaminated with hepatitis C.

But the report, handed by the Irish cabinet this week to the Director of Public Prosecutions, found the IBTSB's response to the London findings "completely inadequate and non-existent". It was also scathing about the IBTSB's decision to not recall contaminated products until February 1994.

Recent figures show that 970 mothers with rhesus positive babies receiving anti-D blood plasma treatment and 210 haemophiliacs were infected with hepatitis C from contaminated IBTSB supplies.

The report, by Mr Justice Thomas Finlay, placed most of the responsibility for the failures in 1976-77 and between 1991 and 1994 on senior IBTSB staff,

including the founding director, Dr James O'Riordan, now 83, senior biochemist Cecily Cunningham, and Dr Terry Walsh, a chief medical consultant with the IBTSB who in 1976 was a junior doctor in charge of donors.

Strong criticisms were also made of Dr James Kirrane, who in 1977 failed to seek an investigation after being told by Dublin's Mater Hospital of reactions among those who had received the anti-D product.

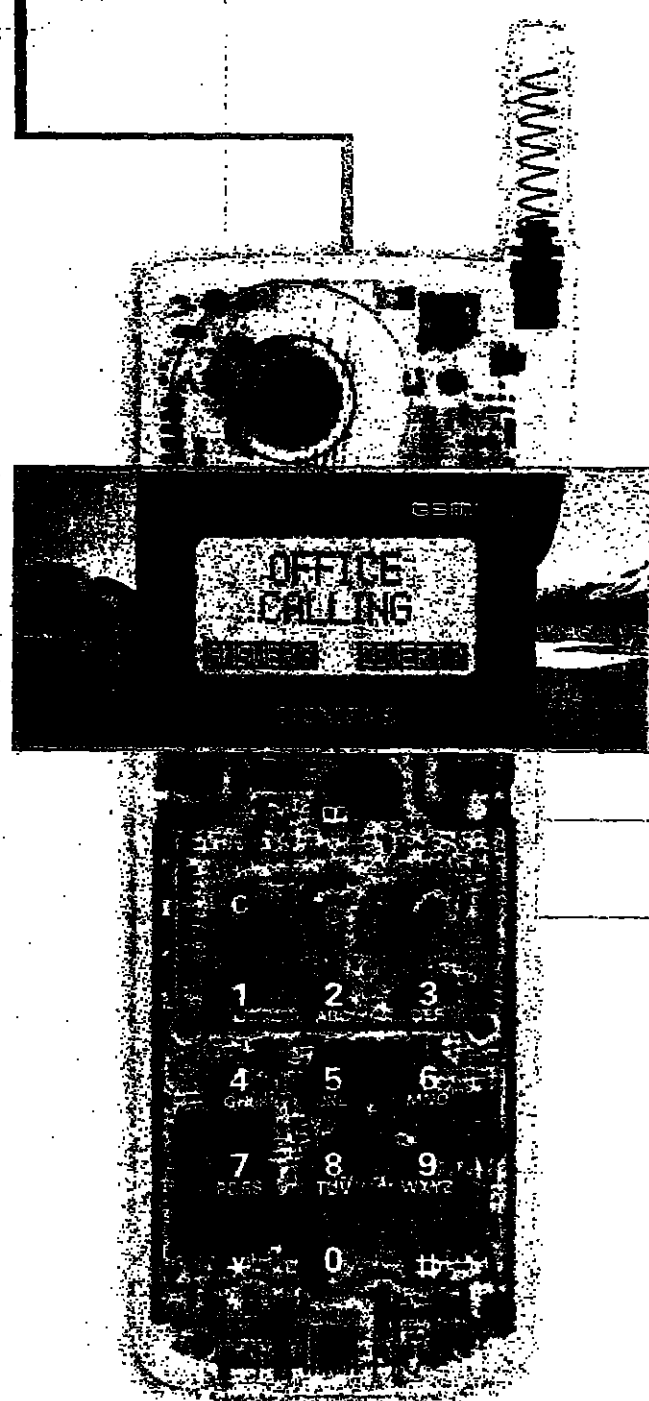
In a damning passage Mr Justice Finlay condemned what he called the IBTSB's "total refusal to face the consequences of what had been done" in 1976.

The inquiry followed the High Court action of Brigid McCole, who died last October days before her case was due to begin. She was determined to establish publicly how she and hundreds of others had been infected since the mid-Seventies. Shortly before her death last October she accepted a settlement of £175,000.

Following claims of ministerial negligence, Brendan Howlin, health minister from 1992 to 1994, said yesterday that trying to blame the fire brigade for the fire. But he said "the government as a whole will have to take its share of the responsibility". Compensation payments are expected to exceed £100m.

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international

Hussein vents his anger at Israel

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

The long paragraphs in the three-page letter from King Hussein of Jordan to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, almost vibrate with rage as he lists his grievances. He says: "My distress is genuine and deep over the accumulating tragic actions which you have initiated at the head of the government of Israel, making peace — the worthiest objective of my life — appear more and more like a distant elusive mirage."

In the course of the letter, sent on 9 March, King Hussein even wonders if Mr Netanyahu would have ordered Israeli warplanes to shoot him down last week if he had tried to pilot the plane flying Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, from Amman to Gaza. The Israelis had refused to allow the flight to enter Israeli airspace. King Hussein asks: "Would you have ordered my fellow pilots in the Israeli Air Force ... to prevent

me forcibly from landing or worse?"

Publication of the text of the letter from the Arab ruler previously considered the most sympathetic to Mr Netanyahu comes as Israel faces increasing international isolation. The latest blow came when the US agreed to attend a meeting next Saturday in Gaza of European and Arab diplomats, summoned by Mr Arafat to discuss the impact of the Oslo accords on the Israeli decision to build a Jewish settlement at Har Homa, and make only a limited withdrawal on the West Bank.

Showing a consideration for the Palestinian leader's feelings not often shown by US officials in the past, Nicholas Burns, the US State Department spokesman, said: "Chairman Arafat obviously feels the need to talk to friendly countries around the world, and that's appropriate." Edward Abington, the US Consul in East Jerusalem, will attend the Gaza meeting, which was condemned by Israel.



State visit: Benjamin Netanyahu in Moscow yesterday. The Israeli Prime Minister said he was baffled by King Hussein's attacks. Photograph: AP

Martin Indyk, the American ambassador, denied yesterday there was any crisis in relations between the US and Israel.

The anger of King Hussein is in sharp contrast to the warming of relations between Israel and Jordan which culminated in the peace treaty between them signed in 1994. Even when Mr Netanyahu was elected last year, King Hussein appears to

have thought that Jordan could act as a bridge between him and the Arab world. But when Mr Netanyahu refused his request "as a personal favour" to fly Mr Arafat back to Gaza, King Hussein slammed the phone down.

The Israeli leader, who has been visiting Russia, says in response to King Hussein that he is "baffled by the personal attacks against me". He says: "Despite

tremendous resistance from some of my own constituency, I have chosen the path of the Oslo process." But the Jordanian monarch makes clear that he no longer accepts this. He says: "I frankly cannot accept your repeated excuse of having to act the way you do under great duress and pressure." He accuses Mr Netanyahu of breaking a promise not to build more settlements.

In January, King Hussein was considered to have played a critical role in arranging an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians over the partial Israeli withdrawal from Hebron. He now asks why Israel was deliberately humiliating its Palestinian partners and why the present phase of withdrawal from the West Bank was so insignificant.

The peace treaty with Jordan

was considered one of the main gains made by Israel as a result of the Oslo accords. He will visit President Bill Clinton in Washington this week and presumably feels the US is itself angry enough with Mr Netanyahu not to object the King's attack on him. He also calculates that his manifesto against the Israeli leader reflects the sentiments of the Arab world as a whole.

US army mired in race scandal

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

The US Army's inquiry into sexual harassment has been thrown into turmoil and racial controversy by claims from white female recruits that they were pressured into making rape charges against their training officers — all of them black.

It has been four months since what appeared one of the gravest scandals in army history erupted, with allegations of systematic sexual harassment at the Aberdeen training base in Maryland. From army installations in the US and around the world, thousands of women soldiers used a special hot line set up by the Pentagon to complain of molestation and persecution by male colleagues.

Now, however, it seems a good measure of the original case may be fiction. Five women from Aberdeen, where eight supervisors have been charged with sex crimes, say that despite intense pressure from investigators, they would not make accusations of rape. Whatever took place, therefore, was consensual — "fraternisation" in army parlance.

But such relations between a soldier and a superior are forbidden, and, as Kathryn Leming, one of the women, told a press conference, "They told me that under army rules it was considered rape. They pushed me and pushed me and tried to make me say rape, but I wouldn't do it because it wasn't the truth."

As a result, the army now has two controversies on its hands: one of sexual harassment and the other race.

The press conference was organised by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and Kwame Mfume, the chairman, is demanding an independent investigation of how the army conducted the inquiry.

The Pentagon dismisses any suggestion of racial motivation, while its investigators deny they ever dangled incentives before the women to secure their cooperation. But in terms of muddying the investigation and embarrassing the army hierarchy, the damage has been done.

Accident sends Japan's nuclear future up in smoke

Richard Lloyd Parry
Tokyo

In the middle of August 1945, refugees from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, who had lived through the fire storm and the collapsed buildings, began dying of a strange disease.

Some were dead within weeks; many lingered on for years or even decades before succumbing. They were the first mass victims of radiation sickness, and it was their plight which instilled in the Japanese a profound and enduring horror of radioactivity.

Compared to memories like these, the fire and explosion at the Tokai nuclear reprocessing plant on Tuesday

were insignificant. Thirty-five workers at the facility, which packs liquid waste into barrels of asphalt, were exposed to "an extremely tiny amount" of radiation, less than one five-hundredth of the maximum annual exposure. There was no significant leakage outside the plant, and within 10 minutes radiation levels had returned to normal.

But the psychological impact on a country increasingly intolerant of its government's big nuclear ambitions will be serious.

Since Hiroshima, a series of nuclear accidents in Japan have only served to reinforce distrust of radioactive technology. In 1954 a boat

full of Japanese fishermen was fatally contaminated in the Pacific after sailing through the fall-out from an American nuclear test.

Nuclear phobia reached a peak after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, and when China and France resumed nuclear testing two years ago there were demonstrations all over the country. But this instinctive aversion is complicated by another deep-seated hang-up: Japan's dependence on outside sources of energy.

With few natural resources of its own, Japan imports almost all its fuel oil, and successive governments have been painfully aware of their vulnerability to war, global price rises,

and the obstruction of shipping routes. At the time of the 1973 oil crisis, nearly 90 per cent of Japan's energy supplies came from abroad. Since then, the government has made a concerted effort to become more self-sufficient.

Nuclear plants provide Japan with 34 per cent of its electricity and the proportion is scheduled to rise to 42 per cent by 2010, with an ambitious programme of reactor construction in quiet coastal areas. Objections from residents have traditionally had little effect on the decisions of bureaucrats in Tokyo but in the past 18 months a mixture of official incompetence and vigorous local campaigning has galvanised opposition and set the programme back by years.

The trouble began in 1995, when the Monju fast-breeder reactor suffered a serious leakage of sodium coolant. The leak was not radioactive but the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation (Donen) dug itself into ever deeper trouble when it was shown to have suppressed or distorted the facts.

Last August residents in the small town of Maki, on the Japan Sea, held Japan's first referendum on a plan to build a reactor: 60 per cent of them rejected it, and the project has been shelved. On Tuesday, while the fire was burning at Tokai, Kyushu Electric Power announced that they too were dropping a controversial plan to build another reactor after strenuous local objections.

The Tokai fire will give further impetus to grass-roots opposition. Already yesterday environmental groups and politicians were pointing out how little Donen seemed to have learned.

How could a fire which was discovered at 10am be allowed to smoulder for so long that it caused an explosion at 8pm? It was three hours before the authorities were told that radiation had leaked — if evacuation had been necessary, this delay could have been deadly.

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هكذا من الأصل

Rebels band together to demand talks

Emma Daly
Kucove, Albania

Even as a second day of talks on the make-up of a caretaker government continued in Tirana yesterday, rebellious civilians in southern Albania moved to shore up the substantial gains of the uprising.

For the first time since the crisis began in January, the unrest reached the capital, with shots fired at assailants who broke into Tirana's military academy. The towns of Saranda, Gjirokastra, Tepelena, Berat and Kucove announced the formation of a national salvation committee, and are demanding a seat at the talks in Tirana and a role in the new government.

A separate committee for Vlorë, cradle of the uprising, has been promised a place in the administration. The appointment of Bashkim Fino, an opposition Socialist from Gjirokastra, as prime minister may be a significant step but has done nothing to satisfy the rebels' main demands: the resignation of President Sali Berisha and repayment of money lost in corrupt investment schemes.

"We are trying to co-ordinate all our activities and operations on the political level," said Abaz Gorani, deputy chairman of the Kucove committee. "We will also have a military side, to co-ordinate our actions if soldiers or supporters of Berisha attack. We do respect Bashkim Fino," he continued, "but we are not happy with any of the political parties. We do not believe in any of them."

The issue at present for the politicians negotiating in Tirana is which party is to control the powerful Interior Ministry and the Shik secret police.

In "rebel" territory, immediate concerns are to restore order and strengthen defences. Gunmen along the main road south to Kucove - where locals seized 23 elderly MIGs - and the town of Berat have built roadblocks in the past 24 hours. In Berat the new police chief, Hiri Helmes, asked citizens to surrender weapons looted from the military, but few responded.

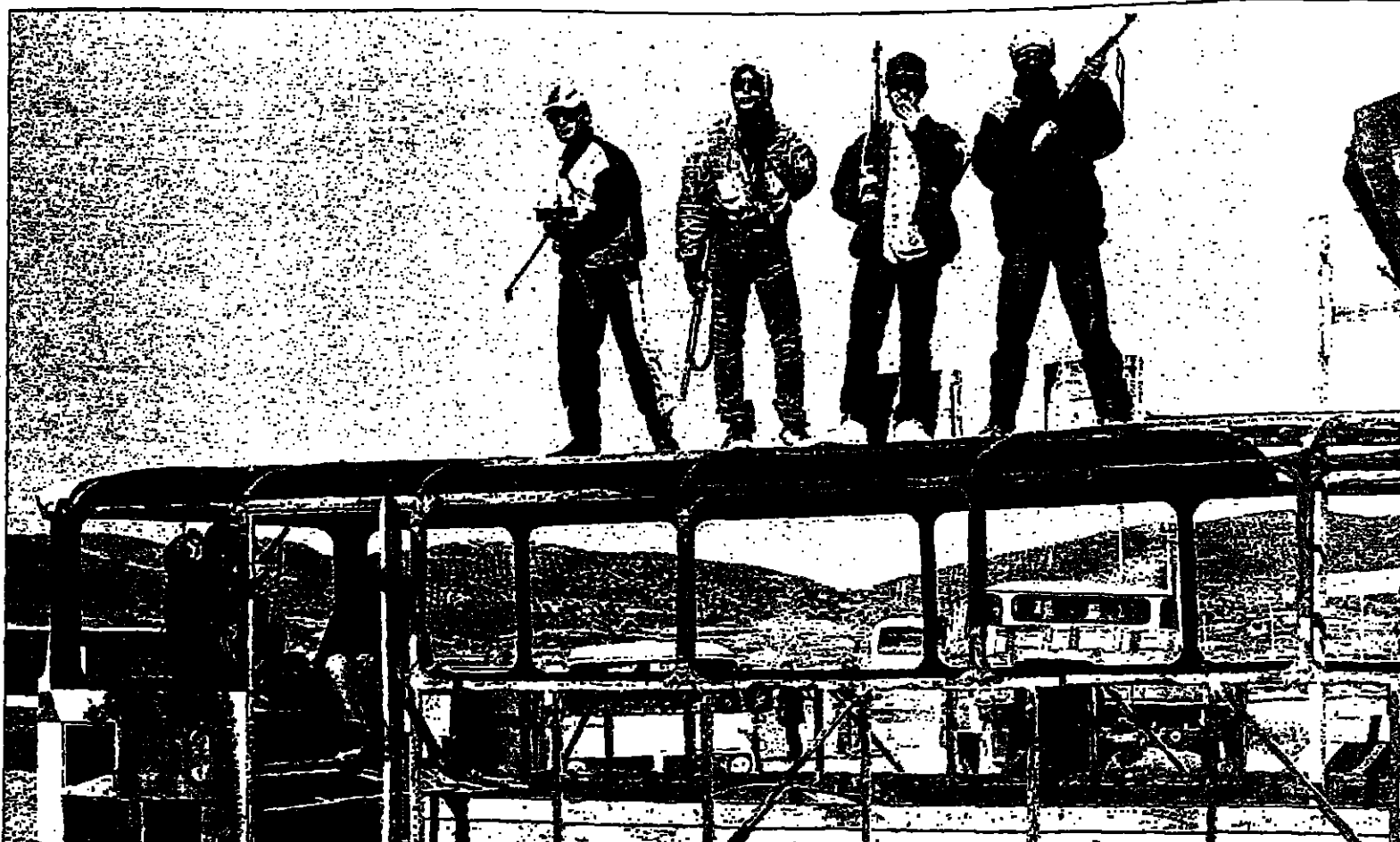
Milutidh Vevercka, a doctor at Berat hospital, said: "Only a few guns have been turned in, mostly by people who didn't know how to use them and who therefore damaged them." He was trying to answer the question vexing diplomats and journalists: how to bridge the gap between party members talking in Tirana and the armed citizens who proclaim disdain of all politicians. "The towns' salvation committees will win credibility for the way they restore order, by stopping thieves and the like," Dr Vevercka said. "The new government will win credibility if the national salvation committee is part of it."

But security must first be assured at a domestic level. In the village of Ardonicë, between two government-controlled towns, men raided a camp for weapons, with what seemed to be army collusion.

Soldiers told us they would not fight if attacked; half an hour later, they were. They took cover in an olive grove, leaving the Shik and traffic police to mount a counter-attack. The two parties exchanged fire, though it was inaccurate, or aimed at the sky. Within 15 minutes it seemed honour had been satisfied, and the police pulled back, apparently having driven off the interlopers.

In Tirana, television cameramen filmed three men walking from the military academy with rifles and ammunition. A few shots sent passers-by running, but the relaxed bearing of the thieves, in a city policed under a state of emergency, led locals to conclude they were Democratic Party activists. Mr Berisha will need their help if he is to survive the crisis.

So far, none of his concessions has made much impression in the south. "First, we want our money back," said Mr Gorani, asked what would end the revolt. "Second, we want Sali Berisha to resign and to be put on trial. Third, we want Albanian state radio and television to start telling the truth. Four, we want the Shik to behave properly." It is a list that may spell the end for Sali Berisha.



Burning issue: Rebels in Pushnje yesterday, as talks on the composition of a new government entered their second day

Macedonia seethes with ethnic tension

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

European Union governments are expressing increasing concern at ethnic tensions in Macedonia which they say have brought the former Yugoslav republic to "boiling point". The British, French and Greek ambassadors handed Branko Cvenkovski, the Macedonian Prime Minister, an EU statement last Tuesday that urged a peaceful end to a three-week-old confrontation between Slav Macedonian students and members of the country's ethnic Albanian minority.

At the same time the Macedonian government has asked the United Nations to suspend plans to scale down its 1,100-

strong peace-keeping force in the country, ostensibly because of the turmoil in neighbouring Albania. The UN force, which contains 500 Americans, has helped preserve Macedonia's precarious stability since 1993, but it was due to be reduced by 300 troops by the end of April.

Both the Macedonian government's request and the EU statement underline the continuing tensions in Macedonia, where most people are Slav-speakers but ethnic Albanians make up 23 per cent of the 2 million population. The latest disturbances began on 17 February in the capital, Skopje, and quickly spread to Tetovo, an ethnic Albanian stronghold in western Macedonia.

According to Enrie Sadikoska, an eth-

nic Albanian student representative, Slav Macedonian university and high school students have chanted slogans such as "Gas chambers and death to the Albanians". Ethnic Albanians have responded with chants such as "Macedonians out of Tetovo".

Tetovo is a highly sensitive city because it borders not only Albania but the mainly Albanian-populated Serbian province of Kosovo, itself seething with ethnic rivalries. About 80 per cent of Tetovo's 100,000 people are ethnic Albanians, and their efforts to operate an Albanian-language university have angered the Macedonians. Some Macedonians suspect the ethnic Albanians of harbouring ambitions of secession and

unification with Albania and Kosovo. The Albanians of western Macedonia declared themselves autonomous in 1992. Last autumn about 1,000 ethnic Albanian schoolchildren were struck down by a mysterious illness that caused headaches and breathing problems. Some ethnic Albanians accused Slav Macedonians of poisoning the children. But World Health Organisation experts said the outbreak had psychological causes.

Underlining the West's fears that unrest in Macedonia could spark a wider Balkan conflict, the EU statement said: "A stable and prosperous country is not only in the interest of the population of Macedonia, but also essential for the stability of the region as a whole."

Striking miners lift siege of Bonn

Imre Karacs
Bonn

Peace returned to the streets of Bonn yesterday as striking miners lifted their four-day siege and retreated 20 miles to the north. It was, however, merely a tactical withdrawal they claimed, as they pitched their tents in a Cologne stadium.

Hans Berger, the leader of the miners' union, vowed that "50,000, maybe 100,000" people would descend on the seat of government if today's talks failed to yield results. Mr Berger was to have seen Helmut Kohl on Tuesday, but the meeting was postponed by the Chancellor at short notice, as demonstrators camped outside his office.

With great reluctance, the miners heeded their leader's advice to leave Bonn, but not before branding Mr Berger a "Judas". Six thousand demonstrators from the Saarland had arrived on Tuesday night and early yesterday morning, replacing the Ruhr contingency who decamped to Cologne.

Mr Berger's agreement to keep the miners away from Bonn appears to have extracted concessions from the government.

At today's meeting, Mr Kohl is expected to propose a delay in the programme to cut back coal subsidies. Although the government still insists that annual support for the industry, which last year amounted to 10bn German marks, should come down to DM5bn by 2005, the new plan foresees the closure of only one pit before 2000.

The revised package is also expected to include a more generous budget for retraining and job creation. Nevertheless, the end result is likely to remain the same. By 2005, an estimated 50,000 miners will have lost their jobs, leaving just 35,000 places in the surviving pits.

PNG's private army spurs Australia into action

Michael Ashworth
Port Moresby

Last month Alexander Downer, the Australian Foreign Minister, arrived in Papua New Guinea for an official visit. As members of the entourage stepped out of their Falcon jet into the hot, humid night air at Port Moresby, they saw the dark outline of the largest aircraft in the world, a Russian-made Antonov 124, curiously followed into confusion, swiftly followed by outrage.

The presence of the Antonov meant that Sandline International, the military advisory company, and the company it subcontracted to, Executive Outcomes, had also arrived in PNG. To Mr Downer's horror, "the world's largest private army" had pitched up less than 100 miles from Australia - with equipment, personnel and an array of sophisticated weaponry.

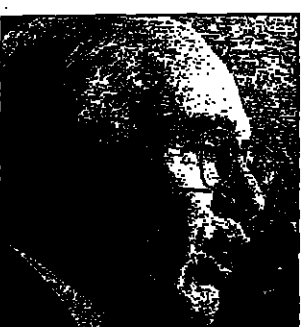
Its presence reflected a PNG vote of no confidence in Australia's ability to assist in resolving the nine-year secessionist conflict on the island of Bougainville by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) which has consistently outmanoeuvred government troops.

This was all the more galling for Australia, since it has enjoyed a close relationship with its former colony, including a \$12m (£7.5m) defence contribution, military assistance and a \$320m aid budget.

What led Sir Julius Chan, the Prime Minister of PNG, to privatised the training of his armed forces was his belief that his

closest ally and friend, Australia, was frustrating his government's attempts to deal with the insurrection. "We ... have requested the Australians support us in providing the necessary specialist training and equipment ... They have consistently declined and therefore I had no choice but to go to the private sector," Sir Julius told *The Independent*.

His approach to the Bougainville problem in the early



John Howard: PNG talks

days of his administration was described by the Australians as "creative and courageous".

In 1994 he convinced the Australians to fund a short-term peace-keeping force drawn from South Pacific countries. He also initiated the Arawa Peace Conference in October that year, and in 1995 established the Bougainville Transitional Government. But all negotiations failed, due to a mixture of BRA intransigence and the ill-discipline of the PNG Defence Force, which made a habit of

committing an atrocity just as a breakthrough was imminent.

Sir Julius was well aware of the lack of control he had over his army. With no assistance forthcoming from the Australians, he looked elsewhere and found it at 535 Kings Road, London, the representative offices of Sandline International. Notwithstanding all the reports about "guns for hire", the main task for Sandline and Executive Outcomes will be to whip the

"We don't like mercenaries ... any reasonable alternative to mercenaries is to be preferred"

army into shape and to act as a "force multiplier" rather than as front-line troops.

Other, non-military, initiatives include buying back the Panguna mine on Bougainville, which is at the heart of the crisis, and directing funds towards economic redevelopment projects on the island.

The Papuans charge that the Australian approach to the problem lacks coherence. Canberra has been unequivocal in its robust condemnation of the BRA, and it endorsed and con-

tributed to the PNG Defence White Paper in July 1996 which recommended "improving and modernising of existing capabilities in the PNGDF".

But Australia has repeatedly turned down requests for assistance in specialist training and procurement of sophisticated weaponry. Weapons and equipment were sold under the caveat that they were not to be armed and not to be used offensively in Bougainville. Australia also used its influence in the West to prevent other nations from supplying PNG with equipment. As well as being irritated by this paternal interference, the PNG government also felt that it smacked of hypocrisy.

The reasons for Canberra's reticence were simple. Despite training provided by the Australians, the PNGDF was not in good order. Offences and human rights violations committed on Bougainville acted as the best recruitment advertisement and propaganda weapon for the BRA. The Australians, wary of public opinion and of being associated with an army criticised by Amnesty International, sought to distance itself.

What developed was a Catch 22 situation. The more the Australians distanced themselves, the worse it became. The worse it became, the more the Australians distanced themselves," says Sean Dorney, a correspondent with ABC who has lived in PNG for 11 years.

While the Australians accuse Sir Julius of employing mercenaries and of applying "a military solution" to a situation that will only backfire, Sir Julius continually reiterates his position that, whilst the national army remains a laughing stock there is little incentive for the rebels to enter into reasonable negotiation. He charges that Australia's "fence-sitting" has hamstringed the Defence Force and allowed a minority of extremists with no international justification to gain control of an area and impose their will on a terrorised people.

There are signs, however, that after the initial violent war of words over the affair, Australia and Papua New Guinea are coming closer. John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister, and Sir Julius held talks on Sunday in Sydney. Following the meeting, there were indications that Australia might increase its training of PNG soldiers. Mr Howard said: "We don't like mercenaries. We think any reasonable alternative to mercenaries is to be preferred."

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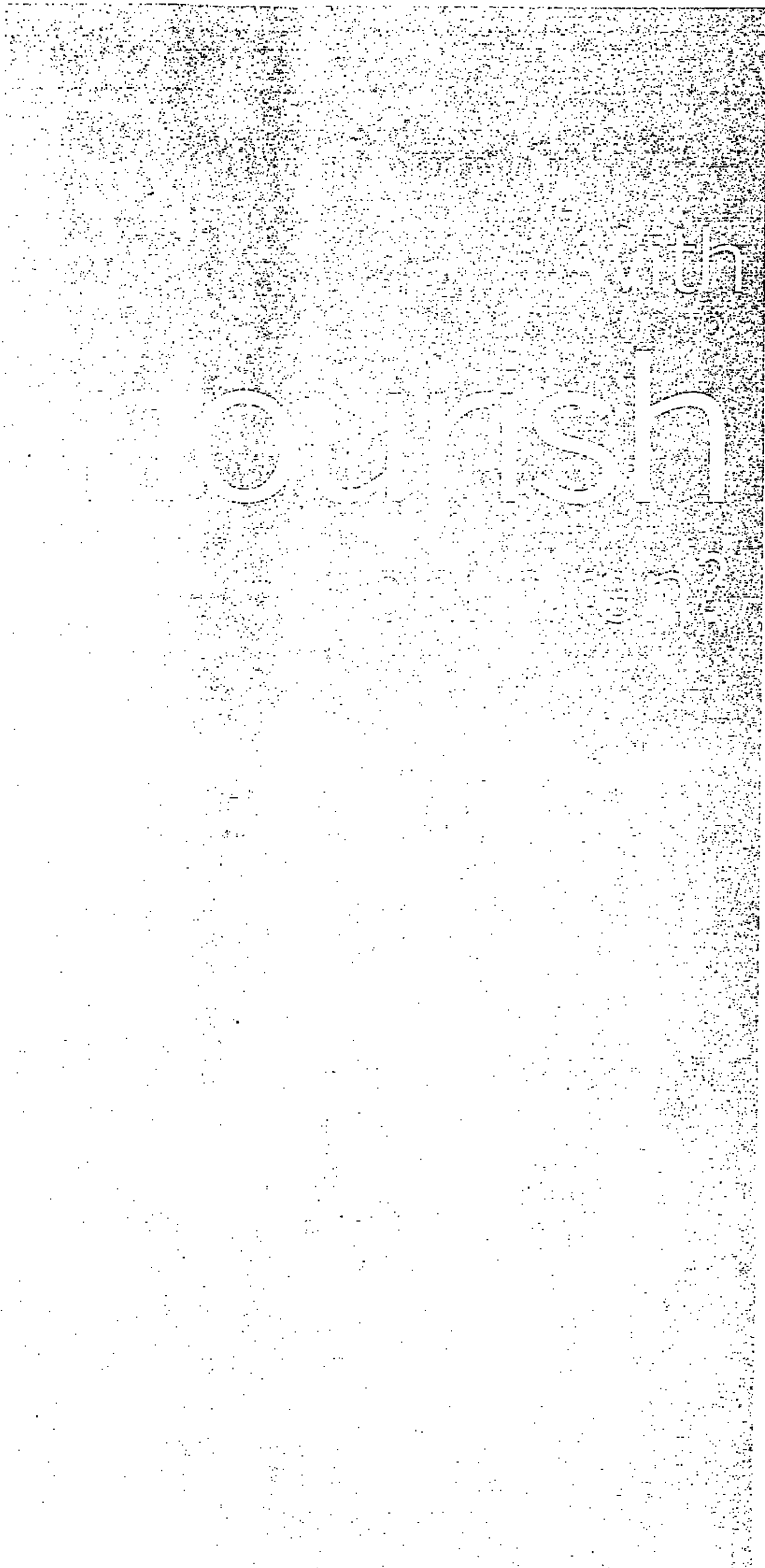
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Forging links behind the Iron Curtain

Nato's plans to expand into central Europe have raised the hackles of Russia, and brought criticism from foreign policy gurus across Europe and America. But the man who laid the foundations for Britain's Cold War policy towards Russia thinks that enlargement is right, whether or not Moscow agrees.

Frank Roberts - now Sir Frank, and 89 - left London in autumn 1944 to take up his post as the minister in the British embassy opposite the Kremlin. He was at the Yalta conference between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at the beginning of February 1945, and arrived in Moscow in mid-March.

There he struck up a close friendship with George Kennan, his opposite number from the United States, and the intellectual grandfather of US national security doctrine. Mr Kennan recently said Nato enlargement would be the great-



In the second part of our series, Christopher Bellamy meets a former key player in Moscow

Did Sir Frank know that at the time? "Of course... But he wasn't a very dictatorial figure. Not like Hitler or Mussolini... He was very softly spoken. So when Churchill and Roosevelt met him they were very pleasantly surprised."

Sir Frank wrote three masterly letters to Ernest Bevin, then foreign secretary, setting out the prospects for co-operation with Russia, Russian aims and attitudes. "George Kennan sent a big think-piece to Washington on the prospects of continuing what we still called the 'Roosevelt policy' of getting on with the Russians. The Foreign Office then asked me to do a similar exercise from the British point of view - there being a slight difference between the British and American positions."

And what was that difference? "We had an empire. We were an imperial power. So we were more vulnerable to what Khrushchev later called 'national liberation movements'. The Cold War as such really came after the Berlin blockade. Before that we were just forecasting, as it were."

"The message really was we [Britain and the US] must be more realistic - if we are we can get on with them."

Did policy towards Russia move in a different direction from that advocated by the diplomats in Moscow, I asked. "It certainly did for Kennan in the US. The Roosevelt idea was, of course, had a very realistic foreign secretary in Ernie Bevin... Of course, I was preaching to a slightly converted audience in the shape of Ernie Bevin - a great trade union leader... Kennan's efforts were less successful in the US."

Sir Frank said that Truman "became a complete convert" to the "realistic" approach, but over time the Americans changed. "Containment became hostility. That was never his [Kennan's] intention."

Our conversation shifted to the present. Did Sir Frank think Western policy towards Russia was the right one?

"I think we have to always remember, whatever it is, the geographically diminished Russia is still a potential great power and in some respects an actual one. The danger with Russia is that people either exaggerate its strengths or exaggerate its weaknesses. I think we are right to encourage as far as an outside

country can the development of democratic institutions in Russia... And make it clear that we want a different but not unfriendly relationship with Russia."

But on Nato, he is unequivocal. "Russia can't be a member of Nato, it's too big. The Russian thing will have to be developed on its own - as one great power with a special relationship with Nato."

So is Nato right to enlarge? "The Russians will never like a country like Poland going into Nato. I think it will result in greater stability in eastern Europe - but I couldn't expect to convince the Russians of that easily. I believe Nato has shown extraordinary resilience in modifying its position. It has to remain an effective military force but at the same time it has to take this great opportunity to provide stability in Eastern Europe, just as it produced stability in Western Europe 50 years ago."



World plans: From left, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at the Yalta conference in the Crimea in February 1945

Stolen kangaroos hop back to circus

Warsaw (Reuters) - Two boxing kangaroos which vanished from a travelling circus in the central Poland town of Nowy Dwor have been found and returned in good shape, police said yesterday.

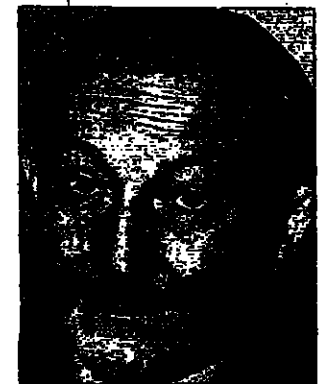
Witold Gieralt, a police spokesman, said that the kangaroos were found late on Tuesday, the same day they went missing.

Stanislaw Zaleski, the circus director, suspected that the kangaroos had been deliberately released from their cage.

"Undoubtedly they were stolen... I don't think it could be any of the [circus] employees. It was a hooligan or someone with a peculiar sense of humour," he said.

While the male kangaroos Gin and Tonic were at large, police warned the public not to approach them because they were experts with their fists.

In fact, both came quietly when caught and their Russian trainer, identified only as Lena, denied they were vicious. "They're as gentle as children, as rabbits," she told *Rzeczpospolita* daily.



Sir Frank Roberts: Nato enlargement is right

Stalin was the most villainous man alive, but very astute. Not a very dictatorial figure

Best post-war error of US foreign policy, but Sir Frank disagrees. He believes Nato could provide stability in eastern Europe, just as it produced stability in Western Europe 50 years ago.

He describes the early days in Moscow with Mr Kennan: "We were doing the same jobs. I was number two to Archie Clark Kerr [British Ambassador] - he was number two to Averell Harriman. We got on extremely well. Our policies towards the Soviet Union were not very different." Indeed, he says, "Someone might have asked why we had two embassies. If we'd been in a meeting with Stalin, we shared it with the Americans and vice versa. We were constantly in touch."

Sir Frank met Stalin many times. "He was the most villainous man alive but a very astute one. He murdered even more people than Hitler."

Customs fraud costs EU dear

Sara Helm
Strasbourg

Europe is losing billions of pounds in customs and tax revenue as international criminals benefit from abolition of border controls and lax revenue policing, the European Parliament was told yesterday.

Europe's spreading "grey" economy is feeding a new criminal underworld, creating a dangerous culture of dependency and depriving the union of much-needed revenue. The inquiry into the failure of the EU transit system and transshipment, chaired by John Tomlinson, a Labour MEP, will undermine confidence in the creation of a border-free Europe.

Criminals based in East Europe are exploiting lax policing of customs and tax systems because member-states have failed to compensate for abolition of border controls by updating crime-fighting systems and sharing information. Four years after the abolition of border controls, member-states continue to act as 15 separate entities, providing free-for-all for the criminals.

The report calls for a common customs investigation body and a centralised customs intelligence office to fight fraud, and computerisation of the entire transit system.

Cigarettes are the biggest business for customs fraudsters, the report says. "A container-load of cigarettes carries a potential fiscal value of about 1m ecu (£700,000). Almost all of this is potential profit for the smuggler." The report focuses on the "community transit system", by which goods from outside the EU move through member-states.

The tax system set up for such goods involves 18 million operations a year, all by paper and open to fraudsters. Goods such as cigarettes or alcohol are simply unloaded clandestinely en route and placed on the black market.

Nobody knows the extent of the fraud, says the report. Estimates vary by billions from country to country. The fraud poses a big threat to the livelihoods of those working for companies operating in the "legitimate economy", putting jobs at risk, says the report.

"More insidious is the malign influence of the 'grey' economy, which is fed by transit fraud and customs fraud in general. This parallel economy thrives at the expense of the legitimate economy, leading to unemployment and slower growth." The inquiry team heard of evidence of a link between the sluggishness of the "official economy" and expansion of the "grey" economy.

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international



Silicon armageddon: A scene from the Hollywood movie War Games, starring Matthew Broderick, in which computers hold the key to global annihilation
Photograph: The Ronald Grant Archive

Britain's defences down against cyber-warriors

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

Britain has left itself open to an electronic attack on the computer systems which now control every aspect of our lives, a written answer to the House of Lords revealed on Monday.

In contrast, the United States has recognised the problem of "information warfare" (IW). A report to the US government obtained by *The Independent* has recommended the creation of a national "focal point" to co-ordinate information-warfare defence, which it estimates will cost \$3.1bn (£1.9bn) over the next five years.

Lord Kennet asked the British Government whether it disagreed with the conclusions of the US report. Earl Howe replied that the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry were each looking at the problem, but indicated there was no

co-ordination between them.

"Within the Ministry of Defence, systems are designed with features to reduce the possibility of a successful attack," he said. "It would not be appropriate to comment on the details of these security features, nor on the resources expended in developing such designs."

However, the US report recognises that it is not just military computer systems, but the entire information structure of the state which could be attacked. It says the US could face a "national security disaster" because it is too dependent on computers which are increasingly vulnerable to a paralysing information warfare attack.

In an internal letter dated 21 November, the chairman of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Information Warfare, Duane P. Andrews, said there is a need for "extraordinary action" to reduce the Defense Department's vulnerability to

information attack which could paralyse or confuse its computer systems; for a new focal point for all information warfare activity; and that the Pentagon had ignored two previous studies which had made similar recommendations.

The report, entitled "Information Warfare - Defense" says: "there is a need for extraordinary

action to deal with the present and emerging challenges of defending against possible information-warfare attacks on facilities, information systems, and networks of the United States which would seriously affect the ability of the Department of Defense to carry out its assigned missions and functions."

A study found that US Central Command could be paralysed by an information warfare attack on one building

The report points out that all current US military doctrines assume information superiority. "The reality is that the vulnerability of the Department of Defense - and of the nation - to offensive information warfare attack is largely a self-created problem."

"Program by program, economic sector by economic sector, we have based critical functions on inadequately-protected telecommunications services. In aggregate, we have created a target-rich environment and the US industry has sold globally much of the generic technology that can be used to strike these targets."

Although war has always been based on deception, as Sun Tzu wrote in the 4th century BC, modern dependence on computers multiplies the opportunity to mislead and to deceive, as well as to merely frustrate decision makers.

The report uses graphics to explain how information warfare is fundamentally different from traditional warfare. The technology is simple, adversaries can remain anonymous, the law is uncertain and it is also uncertain whether an information attack is an act of crime or of war. It is estimated that an opponent might use tactical information warfare against US forces in the field by 2005.

The Russians have devoted great attention to information warfare - especially attack with and defence against computer viruses - since about 1991.

The present Defence Minister, Igor Rodionov, had responsibility for an information warfare research cell when he commanded the General Staff Academy.

Another US study recently

significant shorts

Russian reshuffle brings in liberal reformers

The Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, said he was forming a new government of liberal reformers in a reshuffle the Communist opposition branded "ruinous" for Russia.

President Boris Yeltsin has given Mr Chernomyrdin one week to reorganise his cabinet. "Professional market economists, firm supporters of the President's course of reforms, will come into the government," the Itar-Tass news agency quoted the Prime Minister as saying.

The lower house of parliament, dominated by Mr Yeltsin's communist opponents, demanded a reversal of the changes. "They are an eloquent testimony to the readiness of the leadership to subject Russia and her vital interests to the diktat of the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and foreign capital."

Reuters - Moscow

Zaire targets US envoy

Zairean protesters burned the American flag and demanded the expulsion of the US Ambassador, Daniel Simpson, and his staff, while the Zairean prime minister blamed everyone but France for ignoring what he called the tragedy in eastern Zaire.

Chanting "That's enough, Clinton!" and "Americans, get out!" about 200 people demonstrated at the US embassy. Zairean soldiers moved in to break up the demonstration when the flag was burned. AP - Kinshasa

New flights to China

Air China is to open a new route linking Peking, London and Hong Kong to mark the British colony's return to Chinese rule on 1 July, the *China Daily* said. AP - Peking

\$25,000 jeans come home

Levi Strauss & Co has paid \$25,000 (£15,500) for a pair of its vintage jeans, according to the *New York Times*.

The report said the pair was believed to be one of the two oldest in existence, which had spent time in an inactive coal mine in Colorado and in a vintage clothing store in New York's SoHo district. A leather patch on the waistband said the jeans date from 1886 to 1902, when they would have sold for about \$1.25. Reuters - New York

Prostitute sues for sex fees

A Stockholm man allegedly telephoned a prostitute, arranged to meet her, specified what sexual services he wanted, and then didn't show up, newspapers reported. But the prostitute wanted payment and sent him a bill for 1,500 kronor (£125). When he didn't pay, she fled. One court refused the case, but the woman appealed to a higher court, which ordered that the lower court hear the case next month. AP - Stockholm

Special branch disbanded

Australia's last surviving police special branch was disbanded following allegations of improper activity at a police corruption inquiry.

The New South Wales state police commissioner said more than 20 officers up to the rank of superintendent would be relocated and an inquiry held into the squad's intelligence files. Reuters - Sydney

Marriage proves instant drag

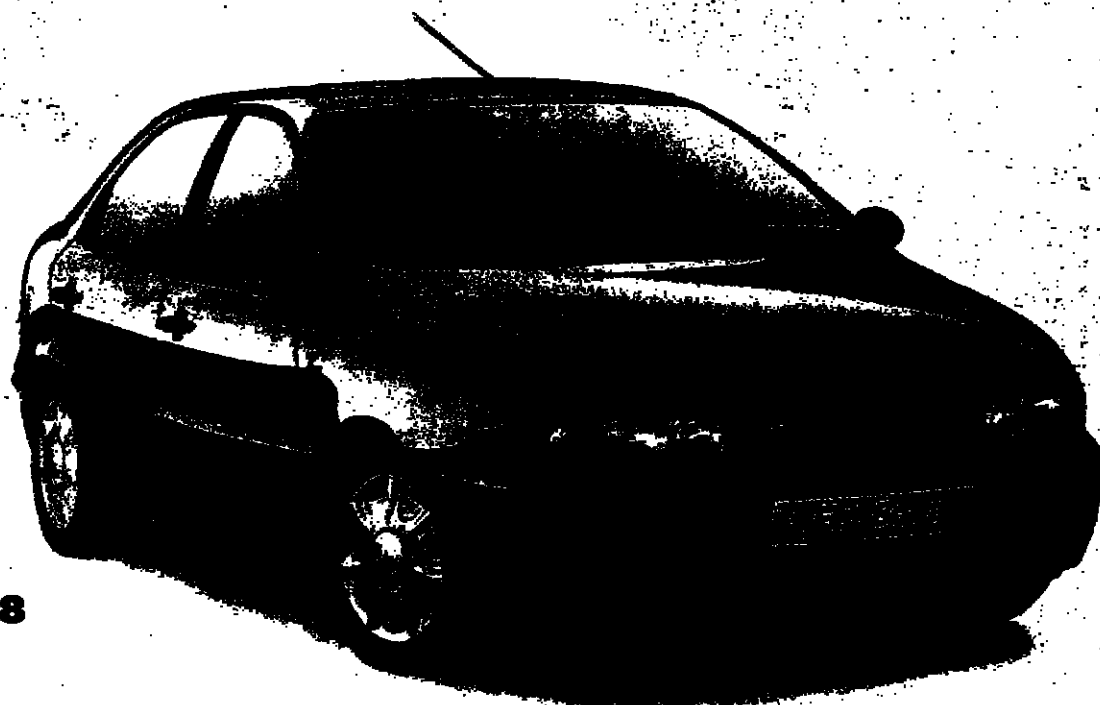
An Indonesian teenager splashed out on a lavish wedding only to find when he got home that his bride was a lie, not a wife.

A Muslim cleric formalised the wedding at Samarinda in East Kalimantan province. But the bride of the 18-year-old groom, the *Jakarta Post* said, was in fact a 38-year-old transvestite drag queen who ran a local beauty parlour. Reuters - Jakarta

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Vouchers are a good idea on paper, but...

When the Tories took office 17 years ago vouchers were a secret code. The word was whispered in think-tank seminars, an idea of daring radicalism. Vouchers for parents of schoolchildren, vouchers for students – at the Adam Smith Institute they talked of little else. Labour's snarling response helped to pump up the idea, made it a kind of policy fetish. An interesting theory became an article of faith. An idea worth a spin, needing to be elaborated, worth a trial under controlled conditions, became a touchstone of partisan identity. Tory ideology explains why the voucher experiment in nursery provision is failing.

Vouchers are, in principle, a way of mobilising competition. Competition is, in principle, a necessary ingredient in public service provision. Thanks to the Thatcherite enthusiasm for driving down the costs of the public sector – an achievement for which Tony Blair rightly credits her – the idea of tendering contracts for the provision of social, health and educational services has become commonplace. Provided contracts can be specified, monitored and re-tendered after a due period, they can be a way of securing public services at less cost than a producer-dominated old-style public authority. Neither local authorities nor health trusts should lack the weapon of contracting out. Vouchers are a way of getting consumers to challenge public providers. Rather than

funnel support for a public service top down through a council's budget, giving consumers a ticket allows them to choose and keep providers on their toes. Vouchers are an opportunity, but likely to work only where a range of providers (schools, universities) already exists.

The problem with nursery vouchers was not the theory, it was the terrain. In parts of the country, schooling effectively begins at four-plus; elsewhere there is a rich mixture of play school, private nurseries, reception classes; in others provision is still sketchy. Mrs Thatcher herself, in an earlier incarnation as a caring education minister anxious to dispel her milk-snatcher tag, had promised to expand nursery provision. Since then, the Tories have had a fit of family fright. It is now very unclear whether as a party they actually want women to leave home to work; if they do, it is not clear whether they believe there ought to be a public responsibility to ensure children are given that peculiar mix of education, entertainment and care which characterises the best pre-school provision.

Confusion notwithstanding, the Major government determined to go ahead with vouchers. But it made two critical errors. One, it assumed the prospect of getting money from parents would encourage voluntary sector and private companies to invest capital in buildings. It also made an error of judgement in neglecting the conse-

quences for pre-schoolers of its own policy of encouraging local management of schools and parental choice of primary schools. Desirable primaries would inevitably seek to maximise their income and their enrolments by themselves expanding into pre-school provision, even if it meant (as it has) attaching hammocks to the rafters and tents in the playground to accommodate the four-year-olds.

Predictions aside, the Government was at first prepared to do something which British social policy has fatally lacked – local experimentation. The refusal of Labour-controlled councils

to take part in this was deplorable, but inadvertently they set up a fascinating case study; if vouchers were not going to work in the favourable Tory surroundings of Kensington and Wandsworth, they were not going anywhere. Well, they haven't worked. But, in spite of negative evidence, in spite of the fact that the experiments had not run their course, a dogmatic government ruled that vouchers were to be extended nationally.

Now the Tories on the House of Commons Education Committee have let light dawn: vouchers may even be forcing private schools out of business.

So far from increasing the number of places, the viability of some schools is being threatened, and the total number of available places may be dropping. In a world in which public policy was conducted with some semblance of rationality, the pilot schemes would have been carried to their conclusion, the evidence coolly evaluated and efforts made to repair the gaps. Instead, the evidence has been ignored.

The failure of nursery vouchers does not mean that "market principles" cannot or should not be applied in the public sector. It does not stamp vouchers with the mark of Cain. It does, however, give two pointers which Stephen Dorrell should pick up before he gives any further thought to his (suspiciously sketchy) plans for the future of social services. One is about basic supply. In ageing Britain, residential care for the elderly will need to grow – vouchers may be an ineffective way of securing adequate provision. There is a conceptual confusion here, too. Mr Dorrell's sensible insistence that most care is now and will continue to be provided by family and out of people's own resources implies that public resources ought to be targeted on those who are in need. But the prospect of such support ought not to be a disincentive to personal savings for old age. In such circumstances, vouchers do not seem to fit at all – vouchers are best conceived as a way of distributing funds universally.

The other pointer is to the emerging role of a public sector which itself provides fewer and fewer services directly. The gap in the nursery formula which is in danger of being repeated in the Government's thinking about social services is the importance of the tasks of inspection, monitoring and regulation. Deregulation is yesterday's cry. In the new "mixed economy" of social policy the role of the state as the enforcer and guarantor of standards needs, if anything, to grow.

Alarm calls in the chamber

It's time for the Speaker to arrive in the Nineties. She has ruled that MPs cannot use bleeper messages sent by researchers to facilitate clever questions during parliamentary debates. How absurd. If those peachy keen advisers had sent their remarks in on old-fashioned note-paper, Betty Boothroyd would not have batted an eye-lid.

She made one wise concession. MPs can receive messages on pagers in the chamber so long as they are switched to vibrate and not to beep. So next time a snoring backbencher freezes to life, we will know what is shuddering in his pocket. The Speaker is not the only one to need waking up now and again.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cloning: the 'experts' must learn to listen

Sir: I recently had the privilege of taking part in a television debate on cloning which included, amongst others, Richard Dawkins ("Dolly and the cloth-heads", 8 March; letters, 11 March).

I was invited because I have been working closely with the ethical aspects, as convener of a working group of specialists in Edinburgh on the ethics of genetic engineering, including Dolly's "discoverer", Ian Wilmut. Imagine my surprise to read in *The Independent* a piece of invective by Professor Dawkins, very obviously referring to our TV debate. His thesis was that religious spokespeople should be excluded from having a public voice on matters where only experts belong. But who is the "expert" who alone is qualified to speak in the public arena?

I was for some years a nuclear inspector, assessing the risk that a Three Mile Island-type accident might happen at Sizewell. But the gulf between what we as "experts" calculated the risk to be and how the public perceived it was enormous. The industry found out the hard way that saying "I am the expert and I will tell how silly you are" was a public-relations disaster, and yet here the Professor of the Public Understanding of Science is doing just that.

First listen to your public. Science has no future if it does not, because the public will rightly cease to own it. We need more non-expert participation on these issues, not less.

Sadly, Professor Dawkins got his facts wrong. The point at issue was never whether clones would lack individuality, but that in ethics there is a world of difference between a deliberate act of cloning an existing human being and the unpredictable occurrence of twins. Three of us made this point to him, but he evidently missed it. But then he is an expert in neither religion nor ethics, and it was a BBC Religious Affairs programme about ethics. One might well ask with equal weight what he was doing there.

Dr DONALD M BRUCE
Director of the Society, Religion and Technology Project
Church of Scotland
Edinburgh

Sir: I know exactly what Professor Dawkins is complaining about in his article, for I have no doubt which radio discussion programme provoked it just two days before his article appeared.

In a three-sided BBC World Service discussion between myself, the professor and a distinguished rabbi, the latter slightly overstated his case about individuality being compromised by genetic identity between clones. Professor Dawkins was on to him like a shot, using the example of identical twins to show that clones already occurred naturally, and with consummate cross-examining skill drove him further out on to the limb which he had tentatively ventured on to.

Clearly the rabbi did understand the science correctly, and could have made the perfectly sound point (which he made to me immediately afterwards) that while identical twins did indeed occur in nature, it would be ethically questionable to create them deliberately.

For the record, Professor Dawkins did agree with me that if there were going to be laws on



human cloning there had to be some public debate about what those laws should contain, and in a democratic society it was absurd to suggest that religious people should not be allowed to take part in such debates (or not take part as vigorously as they could in order to win the argument).

Thus was he forced to retract his earlier allegation that religious people were trying to "sell the rest of us how to behave". I suppose I could have written a supercilious article for you about how scientists like him do not understand the democratic process, citing something I had heard one of them say recently in a radio studio.

CLIFFORD LONGLEY
Orpington, Kent

Sir: I believe Richard Dawkins has always supported the need to explore rationally the deep ethical concerns about the possible uses of scientific discoveries: there are plenty of philosophers of science and professors of medical ethics competent to do this.

No "overstretched" and poorly informed person – religious leader or otherwise – need write or broadcast their comments, whatever the blandishments of the media (letter, 11 March). Any such overstretched scientist asked to comment on "the implications of Popper's objective knowledge", or anything else, would reply: "Search me, mate – not my field. But contact X or Y, they're bang up to speed on these issues."

ANN DUNCOMBE
Menstrie, Central Scotland

Sir: I always enjoy reading Professor Dawkins's articles, mainly to find the pft of his current

invective – recently about 2.1 on my Universal Indicator.

Could I remind the learned Professor of the Public Understanding of Science what a much greater scientist wrote in 1615: "I think that in discussions of physical problems we ought to begin not from the authority of scriptural passages, but from sense-experiences and necessary demonstrations: for the holy Bible and the phenomena of nature proceed alike from the divine Word, the former as the dictate of the Holy Ghost and the latter as the observant executrix of God's commands."

Was Galileo such a cloth-head?
Dr H W JONES
Nantwich, Cheshire

Allow women in labour to choose

Sir: In the emotionally charged debate about Caesarean sections, I am alarmed to see that Professor Horner states that the treatment of choice for breech presentation is Caesarean section (letter, 10 March).

Routine Caesarean section for the term breech foetus is not justified by the available data. It is one of several treatment interventions available, the others including selected vaginal breech delivery or external cephalic version at term.

The effectiveness of this latter procedure is demonstrated by clear evidence from controlled trials, and the Royal College of Obstetricians

and Gynaecologists has suggested that units audit their success in achieving the standard that "all women at term with an uncomplicated pregnancy in breech presentation should be offered external cephalic version".

We have a duty to provide our patients with reliable accurate information about options available to them, so they can make a fully informed choice.

MIKE DIVERS
Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist
Douglas, Isle of Man

Sir: One would have more sympathy with the Court of Appeal in the Caesarean section case, and with the views of the learned chairman of the BMA's medical ethics committee (letter, 10 March), if English law embodied a presumption in favour of the unborn child. But the common law has never done so, and foetuses in the waste bags at hospitals and clinics graphically demonstrate that neither does statute.

If the woman concerned had earlier wanted to terminate the pregnancy she could, with medical agreement, have done so. But as she preferred to leave the viability of the foetus to nature (or, as some would say, to the will of God) she was prevented from so doing, by an unholy combination of judges and medics. Without a presumption of law in their favour, by what right do they impose their own judgements on the bodies of pregnant women?

NIC COIDAN
University of Huddersfield

Sir: Robert Forman is right to suggest that women should be able to exercise their choice in pregnancy care and support but wrong in his claim that it is not available via medical insurance (letter, 7 March).

PPP Healthcare does make provision for normal pregnancy in some of its private health care plans. Depending on the product selected, a woman can claim for all eligible antenatal and postnatal consultations, ultrasound scans and any diagnostic tests the consultant requests after an initial qualifying period.

JONATHAN RUSSELL
Group Director of Public Relations
PPP Healthcare Group
London WC1

Vary energy tax

Sir: In view of Michael Meacher's evidently strong support for a sustainable energy policy (letter, 10 March), I hope he will vigorously oppose the Labour Party's current policy of reducing value-added tax on energy.

There is an evident need to increase the cost of energy to consumers, so as to encourage increasing efficiency of use, and reduce demand. At the same time, it is essential not to increase the financial burden on those least able to pay, who are often stuck with poorly constructed, energy-inefficient housing.

There appears to be a straightforward way to achieve both aims. This is to set an initial

consumption amount per year which would be taxed at a low rate of VAT (say, zero), for each domestic customer account. All energy consumed above this amount would be taxed at a higher rate (say, the standard rate of 17.5 per cent).

CH OSMAN
Aberdeen

Millennium myth

Sir: M C Patrick (Letters, 7 March) states that "under the Computer Millennium Problem up to 90 per cent of computers will be unable to move ... to 1 January 2000, and will become useless".

This is an urban myth. Virtually all computer systems are perfectly capable of dealing with dates in the next century: the problem is only with certain quite old (mainly pre-Eighties) software, most of which will be fixed well before 2000. Those making most noise are the contractors who are offering to fix these software problems, and certain elements of the mass media.

BEN HUTCHINGS
Oxford

Motorway speed

Sir: Motorists' failure to observe advisory speed limits is often blamed for motorway pile-ups in fog ("It looks like the road to Basra", 11 March). Drivers would probably take more notice of the signs if there were not so often a failure to revise or cancel the advised limit as soon as driving conditions change. All too often the warning lights are found to be crying wolf.

FRANCIS ROADS
London E18

Moon 'fakers' missed a trick

Sir: If the pictures of the first lunar landing are indeed wholly or partly faked (Letters, 7 March), then one small question arises. How come no one bothered to fake any pictures of Neil Armstrong?

It has been a cause of irritation in the British Interplanetary Society and other like-minded bodies that no photographs exist of the first man on the Moon. He took plenty of shots of Buzz Aldrin, but by a strange oversight it appears that Aldrin never took any of him. Our only pictorial record of Armstrong on the lunar surface is a small and distorted reflection on the face-plate of Aldrin's helmet.

It is the sort of thing that happens sometimes in real-life situations: but don't try to convince me that any fraudster could be that stupid.

MICHAEL STONE
Peterborough

Sir: Your Science Editor, Charles Arthur, states ("Comet sets blazing trail", 11 March) that the Moon is 93 million miles from Earth. Presumably he means the Sun, which is indeed approximately 93 million miles away (the Moon is about a quarter of a million miles from us).

Also, Mr Arthur states that Comet Hale-Bopp is 400km wide; by all other accounts it is just 40km wide.

What's a decimal point between friends? Well, if Hale-Bopp was really 400km wide, and was not further away than the distance of the Moon, I for one would be digging a hole right now.

BOB GRAINGER
Comet Quest
Bristol

Liverpool needs to face reality

Sir: As long as journalists allow Liverpoolians to enjoy and promote their cosy self-image of brave loser and victim, nothing in this city will ever change, nor will anyone want it to ("Hidden virtues of loser-friendly Liverpool", 11 March).

Yes, community is here, but parochial and rigidly defined by class, religion and background, and heaven help anyone who is neither Catholic nor working class.

Liverpoolians can choose to stay in their early-20th-century persona or come into the nearly-21st century and face the harsh realities of modern life. They should not expect to do both, nor should they be encouraged in this by outsiders.

EVELYN ROSS
Liverpool

Pesky mink

Sir: R Burfoot writes about the ethics of mink farming (letter, 10 March). Does he know of anyone who will actually "open the cage and see it bolt for the freedom of fresh air"?

If he does, he is perhaps ethically obliged to point out to them that the mink is an enthusiastic carnivore. What it is bolting for is more likely to be a meal off our native small animals and birds, or their young, than fresh air.

Whether or not it should be farmed for fur, the mink is not a nice animal or a friend to others. We do not want it in our countryside.

PHILIP O'DONOGHUE
New Barnet, Hertfordshire

the commentators

No promises to keep the NHS fully funded

Usually the NHS is Labour's Big Issue at election time. But there is surprisingly little sign of it as yet. Remember the War of Jennifer's Ear over a Labour party political broadcast last time? Remember how Robin Cook used to jump up and down like Rumpelstiltskin, proclaiming that the Tories were out to privatise the NHS – which no one quite believed? Well, where is the noise now? Only an eerie silence.

Last week Jack O'Sullivan, spelt out on these pages the scale of the crisis facing the NHS. It needs close to 3 per cent above inflation each year to keep up with the ageing population (40 per cent of NHS money is spent on the over-65s) added to unstoppable demands for new drugs and treatments. Under the Tories, the NHS has survived adequately on 2.6 per cent extra a year. Occasionally it dipped down, but loud shrieks of pain ensured that the following year it caught up. Easing in the NHS reforms, the Government greased the wheels; when things got tight the NHS got a bung. It happened this year – the NHS was due no real increase but Dorrell stole an extra £400m from the capital account to put into the current account. (The capital account is cut by a third, a serious problem for next year.)

Times are hard again with a familiar end-of-year squeeze – surgery lists closed, 50-hour waits on trolleys in A & E and accelerated hospital closures. Trusts are also borrowing heavily from next year's budget and delaying paying creditors, sanctioned centrally with gleeful mounting debts for incoming Labour. (There are signs of this kind of scorched earth policy in other departments as well.)

But it is the spending plans for the next few years that are truly alarming. Next year the NHS is allotted only a 0.9 per cent increase. In 1998-99, it faces a disastrous cut of -0.6 per cent, and the following year, a calamitous zero increase. Never, ever, in the patchy financial history of the NHS, have there been four years in a row like these. The figures in the Treasury's Red Book would mean a mass flight to private insurance and the end of the NHS as anything but a safety net for the poor. The NHS for once is not waving straws but drowning.

Now that is the doomsday scenario and Labour's Iron shadow Chancellor has signed his name in blood to it. So both parties are apparently committed, (on paper), to killing off the NHS. Could this explain their eerie silence? Neither can fight the other effectively on this shifting quagmire.

Do we really believe they will stick to those figures? I want to see both Stephen Dorrell, the Health Secretary, and Chris Smith, Labour's shadow, to divine their true intent. Of course they both say the NHS is safest in their hands – but the hands of both of them are tied. It's a no-win arm-wrestle.

Stephen Dorrell can get away with more winks and nods on the spending front (not that he is winking or nodding sort of man). What he in fact said was: "I'm not going to be drawn on what the Budget settlement may be for future years, beyond what's spelled out in the Red Book. But if the case does have to be made for substantial growth, then it will have to be justified on its merits." In other words, he would fight for more.

He adds his campaign speech: "The difference between us and Labour is that we are committing ourselves to real terms growth year on year. We certainly aren't committing ourselves to large growth, but it does commit us not to cut." His features are deadpan, but next comes what seems for that wink and nod: "Judge us by our track record. Over the last 18 years we have delivered real growth to the Health Service. If there are special pressures



Polly Toynbee
Commentator
of the Year

Stephen Dorrell and Chris Smith both admit they will not be allowed to spend what is needed on health

in later years they will have to be examined. I hope I will advance the best case for a growing budget for the NHS, as the most cost- and quality-effective health service in the world."

Now poor old Chris Smith would be garrotted by Gordon Brown if he went as far as even Dorrell's Minimalist nudge-nudge. If he said the money would be there, the hyena Mawhinney would have him up on a billboard the next day. No, Smith has to spell out exactly how Labour will save money within the NHS budget through clever wheezes in order to plug the horrendous spending gap. Such as saving £100m on management, by cutting to one-tenth the number of contracts exchanged. No doubt money can be saved, maybe £100m – but it's chickenfeed.

Chris Smith makes a convincing case for managing the NHS better – but where's the money? "I will argue my case for a fair share at the cabinet table," he promises. "I will show that every pound is wisely spent. The NHS will also get its share of money cascading in as the unemployed go back to work, financed by the windfall tax. It can be done."

There is not a shred of ideology in either man's view of the NHS; no flags to wave or battle cries. Both men are deeply absorbed by the NHS's vexing intellectual conundrums. Both quote new research on effectiveness – the treatments and drugs that really work – as the key to wiser spending.

Smith is right in saying that the contracting system could be streamlined, but this is not really the stuff of election politics. Out there on the doorstep, every candidate says the NHS is the Big Issue. The irony is that in the real world, it is probably now the least political issue. All that matters is who will fund it best. The best guess is that both men would fight valiantly for more money and both governments would strain every muscle to bung in enough money to keep it creaking and groaning along as it always has done.

The figures are nonsense, and what they accuse one another of is half-hearted nonsense too. And everyone knows it. The one unshakable electoral fact is that the whole nation supports the NHS passionately and will not tolerate its demise. The party that seriously damages it will be a dead party – and the Tories have always known that.

What of the future? In power, Chris Smith may have the hot breath of Rodney Bickerstaffe's low-paid Union members upon his neck. In opposition, Dorrell may be plagued by some fruitcake ideologue such as Redwood for a leader full of clever ideas for selling off the NHS. Each has his nightmare scenario. Dorrell says perceptively that what he really fears is an NHS that stops changing – by which I take him to warn that Labour may simply offer stasis; new health developments gallop apace and need constant revolution, challenge and response. But Chris Smith is not short of radical ideas: NHS staff can expect jolting new reforms from him, too.

As for this election campaign, an honest and decent man like Chris Smith may choke on promises that Labour would save the NHS while the wicked Tories would privatise it. Every time he tries to make political capital out of scandalous cuts and lengthening waiting lists the other side will bellow back at him: "What would you do, then?" If Labour wants to play the NHS card effectively then Gordon Brown will have to come up with a better story for Chris Smith to tell – and that means more money up front before the election. (It will certainly be there after it.) The NHS is a winner for Labour – but not without visible, credible cash on the table to expose the Tories' killer Red Book plans.

For today's foreign correspondent – that intrepid breed of reporter beloved of film directors from Hitchcock to Oliver Stone – the only place to be right now is Hong Kong. In the run-up to Independence Day on 1 July, Britain's about-to-be-former colony is currently pullulating with hordes of all shades and conditions, busily tacking between the New Territories, the Governor's residence and the Mandarin hotel, canvassing street opinions, interviewing nervous Western bankers, trying to second-guess the mood of the Chinese authorities in the wake of Mr Deng's demise ...

Or then again, not. What most of them are doing, it seems, is trying to break into the movies.

Perhaps inflamed by the sight of Jonathan Dimbleby prowling the streets with his camera team while filming *The Last Governor*, his television documentary on Chris Patten, to be shown in the early autumn, the assembled hacks have been queuing up to appear in *Chinese Box*, a feature film that uses the colonial handover as the *vérité* background to a love story.

It's directed by the charmingly named Chinese auteur Wong Kar-wai (who made *Smoke*, screenplay by Paul Auster) and stars our own Jeremy Irons as a television journalist who deserts his beloved for the far-from-inscrutable charms of Gong Li, dreamboat star of *Farewell My Concubine*. The script, which started life as a Paul Theroux story but dropped his services somewhere along the line, calls for Irons to roam the streets with a video camera, filming picturesque views of the skyscrapered antihill and talking to his fictional journo peers. A small army of hacks have, in consequence, been volunteering themselves as extras, and smartening up their act (new macintosh, new spiral notepad, new packet of Players) in the hope of being immortalised on celluloid.

To help the selection process, Irons was invited along to the Foreign Correspondents Club to meet some distinguished scribes. But sadly, according to my man in the Chinnery Bar, although Irons drank a lot of tequila, he was "not over-impressed with the quality of the people he met". Blast it! Back to the word processor, chaps.

A charming rider to this story is that the lovely Gong Li recently had to take a break in filming in order to attend a vote. As well as being one of China's top actresses, it seems Ms Li is an important member of the Chinese people's party, the National People's Congress, and had to hit the division lobby in Peking under the Chinese equivalent of a three-line whip. Somehow one cannot imagine this sort of double career happening to Gillian Shephard.



Whether the dead person winds up in a barge, an urn, a Mercedes or a cart, it's the same narrative trajectory

john walsh

Visitors from distant galaxies would have been intrigued by the range and variety of bourgeois undertakings: lots of baby-sitting, dog-sitting and many services, *naturelement*; orchestra-loads of music lessons, and tuition in singing, Scottish reels and that peculiar step-to-the-left business called "line dancing"; several hundredweight of carrot cakes and birthday gateaux in exotic post-Jane Asher configurations; plenty of informative trips to museums for other people's doubtless enthralled children; scads of homeopathy sessions and Massage with Essential Oils; lots of self-improvement courses, from German conversation to acupuncture and Internet surfing (the latter has achieved a spurious cachet among the vodka-martini classes of SE21 since last week's news that the Queen has allowed a bearded colonial to show her the ropes on the World Wide Web). Various servile activities were curiously offered, as if through their proposers' clenched teeth ("Three hours' gardening"; "A bag of ironing") along with items which, in their naked utilitarianism, went straight to the heart of south London life (promises to re-pot your plants, or sew name-tapes on school uniforms).

In addition to these heady prospects, you could bid for a flight to Le Touquet for lunch ("lunch not provided"), courtesy of a raffish parent with a seven-seater Cessna, or go fly fishing at a secret trout stream on the River Wey. But marketing departments everywhere will be glad to know that Holidays and Meals Cooked By Someone Else remain the most enthusiastically regarded treats in the national psyche. Offers of catered dinner parties were snapped up at top speed: while the top bid – somewhere in the mid-hundreds – was paid for a week in a cottage in Aldeburgh. God, it was all so British. I could have sworn I made out the figures of Beethoven, Britten and Rupert Brooke sitting amid the gesticulating bidders. It must have been the wine ...



As far as I'm concerned, Graham Swift can do no wrong; but I wonder if the Australian professor John Frow, who accused the Booker laureate of plagiarising William Faulkner, might have a point. Of course it's a bloody cheek to walk off with somebody else's "structure" and build oneself a house in its image. But if we are to snipe at Mr Swift for "borrowing", ought we not to belabour Mr Faulkner's mouldering remains for doing some borrowing of his own? The plot of *As I Lay Dying* – a dead man's closest associates ferry his remains through a lovingly described landscape to a mysterious and fantastically symbolic final resting-place – is, of course, a total rip-off from *Judith of the King*, a mournful Arthurian epic by Tennyson, who himself pinched it shamefully (and without any knowing winks and nods in the text) from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Whether the dead person winds up in a barge, an urn, a Mercedes or a cart, it's the same narrative trajectory. But once you start looking into "borrowings" in literary history, there's no stopping.

I dunno. Next they'll be saying that Joyce got the idea for *Ulysses* from someone else.

... although it would be second nature to Glenda Jackson, MP for Hampstead and Highgate, faces an awesome threat at the election. It comes from Mr Ronnie Carroll, the square-jawed Belfast crooner who in the late Fifties represented the nation in the Eurovision Song Contest with "Ring-a-Ding Girl" and "Say Wonderful Things To Me" (he came fourth, alas, both times). Mr Carroll, a Hampstead dweller for 30 years, spends many happy hours at a High Street café called the Coffee Cup, which is faced with "redevelopment". Instead of accepting that times change, buying a jar of Cap Colombie and making his own coffee, the relaxed ex-crooner has decided to man the barricades. He will stand for Parliament on a "Home Rule for Hampstead" ticket: once arrived at

the Commons, his main, indeed sole policy undertaking will be to stop anyone getting their mitts on the NW3 cappuccino machines. "I'm prettier than Glenda Jackson," he says ungalantly, "so I'll probably do quite well."

Should the editors of *Social Trends*, the fascinating yearly investigation of the nation's behavioural patterns, be interested in the state of middle-class enjoyments, I may be able to help. I took part the other night in a fund-raising auction (indeed, I played auctioneer in frock coat and poney waistcoat) at our local school in Dulwich, where the things under the hammer weren't objects *d'art* but "Promises". Eighty donors promised to do, or to arrange, certain things for which others (ie, the rest of the 80) would pay large sums of money.

Small voices tell ghastly truths

The British don't like children very much. And we particularly don't like children in care who, after long-term abuse and neglect, tend to be awkward and difficult. But they remain our responsibility whether they are sweet little Miss Pears types or not.

The Social Services White Paper published yesterday has been hailed as proposing the most radical shake-up in social services for 25 years. But in one respect it is several steps back when it comes to dealing with children.

It is nearly eight years since the Children Act of 1989, brought in as a result of the Cleveland inquiry, made clear that the interests of the child should be paramount. Yesterday's announcement challenges that, reviving the idea that adults do know best in the end, and a bit of hard discipline never hurt anyone. Especially if they are young tearaways to start off with.

This part of the White Paper, said to be rewritten by Mr Dorrell himself, emphasises the fear that over-enthusiastic social workers are falling victims to weedy political correctness.



Glenda Cooper

We have heard too much about 'firm control' of children. Does anybody remember pindown?

Now that "child abuse" is a phrase that can be uttered in public, it is feared they see it everywhere. Social workers themselves tell a different story. One comments: "Breaking up families? Chance'd be a fine thing. A lot of our work is parents standing in our office demanding that their children be taken away because they can't cope."

The White Paper reiterates that the interests and wishes of the child should be taken into account. But it adds: "The Government ... does not believe however that emphasising the interests of the individual child should be allowed to become an excuse for distorting the proper relationship between children and adults." The paper continues: "When decisions about the care of children are being made it is important to listen to their views according to their age and capacity but it is equally important not to ascribe to children the capacity to make mature judgements about their interests which are the proper responsibility of adults. To do so is not to protect their interests but to prejudice them." According to the

Department of Health, this is designed to redress the balance in residential homes. The "proper relationship" and "proper responsibility" for social workers can be translated as: "They should stop caring into children's wishes but exert firm discipline." For example, if kids won't do what they are told and persist in running away, bolt the doors. Stop being subservient to what they say and put your foot down.

No one is putting forward the view that children are angelic, Rousseau-esque beings who behave immaculately and never tell lies. "You have to acknowledge children can embroider the truth as we all do," Dave Burchell, assistant director of the British Association of Social Workers, says. "But to suggest we should ignore them is exceedingly dangerous."

Children do not make up accusations of ill-treatment or make trouble needlessly because they want their families broken up. All they want is the situation that they are unhappy with dealt with.

Say a teenage girl says she has been sexually abused. There is no evidence for that so social

services must balance the probabilities of it having happened. One of the things they must take into account, although not unquestioningly, is the account of the girl herself. If it does turn out to be a pack of lies, there is still the question to be answered: why is she making up such a serious allegation?

The problem with toughening our attitude to children is that we have not been good enough about listening to children in the past. It may be a great vote-winner to limit "child power" and demand "firm control" over them (although the White Paper concedes there should not be "habitual reliance on physical coercion"). Much the same language is being used for prisoners by both sides of the house: punish and lock up rather than rehabilitate.

But we have heard too much about "mature judgements" and "firm control". Does anyone remember "pindown" in Staffordshire, the Kincora boys' home in Northern Ireland, Frank Beck in Leicester? In all cases children's voices got drowned out over the years.

On Monday's *Panorama* programme it was revealed that

one boy at Greystone Heath, a children's home in the North-West, told his mother and the police he was being abused by his housemaster, Dennis Grain. The police were told by the school that he was a "malicious liar" and no action was taken. It was 20 years before Grain was jailed after confessing to paedophile offences.

Last week Judge Huw Daniel jailed Keith Laverack, a former social services manager, at Chester Crown Court after two decades of abuse. "You were confident you could get away with it because the system allowed you to get away with it and you ensured the silence of these children by threats and sweet talk, confident in the knowledge that if these children did complain they would not be believed," the judge said.

Ministers rightly acted last October to tighten up regulation of children's homes. And now it boasts that the abuse in north Wales is being "properly investigated". But the sad fact is that if we had listened to children in the first place, we would not need these investigations now. Mr Dorrell, don't let's make the same mistake again.

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The Earl of Listowel

Billy Listowel was the last Secretary of State for India and Burma, and the last Governor-General of Ghana. He was the sole surviving Labour member of Churchill's wartime coalition government, and the longest-serving member of the House of Lords. He was also the first, and so far only, Labour peer to have held the post of Lord Chairman of Committees. He was immensely popular with everyone who knew him, in the House and all over the world. Gentle and warm-hearted, Listowel turned to socialism in the early 1920s. He had experienced profound shock on discovering how poor children lived in a slum near his parents' home in London. At Eton, where he was the only known socialist (except for the headmaster's wife, Mrs. Alington), he debated with Quintin Hogg about the House of Lords and the hereditary principle, opposing both. Although Viscount Ennismore, he preferred to be known at school as Mr. Hare.

From Eton he went up to Balliol College, Oxford, to read Modern Greats. The Oxford Union provided him with an enjoyable platform for the expression of his political views but, as the socialist heir to an hereditary title, a rare phenomenon at that time, his activities attracted press attention. His father removed him after only a year and asked the Marquess of Willington, then Governor-General of Canada, to accept his son as an aide-de-camp.

In the event Listowel was allowed to continue with his university education - at Magdalene College, Cambridge. There he read English and developed an interest in aesthetics. He went to study under Professor Victor Basch at the Sorbonne, and to London University to write a doctoral thesis, published as *A Critical History of Modern Aesthetics* (1933), expanded as *Modern Aesthetics: an historical introduction* (1967). In 1932, shortly after his father's death, Listowel took his seat in the Lords. Daily attendance at the House was then made up of fewer than 100 peers, all hereditary, who sat for three hours a day, three days a week. The House might deal

with 200 amendments in a session, compared with 2,000-3,000 today. The small number of Labour peers, led by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, the son of Queen Victoria's Private Secretary, could be accommodated comfortably on two benches. When war broke out in 1939, Listowel volunteered to join the ranks. Disqualified from active service on account of his poor eyesight, he joined the RAMC. But during a camp near Aldershot ("the worst experience of my life," he recalled) he was selected for Intelligence Corps training. Once commissioned he was posted to London District in Mayfair, where he became great friends with one of his fellow Second Lieutenants, the philosopher A. J. Ayer.

On one occasion, during a scare about leaks of information from the front, Listowel was sent to sit at a table in the Café Royal to monitor the conversation of British troops home on leave. The noise in the restaurant was such that Listowel was unable to hear a word anyone said; the exercise was swiftly abandoned. Other duties included the interrogation of German prisoners of war, mostly sailors, at "the Cage" on Kensington Palace Gardens.

In 1941, Viscount Addison, the Leader of the Labour Party in the Lords, invited Listowel to accept the post of Opposition Chief Whip. Listowel agreed, and Addison obtained permission for his release from the forces. Three years later, in the coalition government, he became Deputy Leader to the Marquess of Salisbury in the Lords, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the India Office under Leo Amery, who arranged for him to sit in on meetings of the Cabinet's India Committee.

After the Labour Party's election victory in 1945, the India Committee recommended independence for the subcontinent within the lifetime of the Government. Listowel recalled that whilst, during the war, Attlee had been careful to represent Churchill's conservative views in committee ("very much His Master's Voice," as Listowel put it), once Prime Minister himself, Attlee ensured that

his Cabinet adopted the liberal recommendations of the committee he still chaired. Stafford Cripps, who had led the Cripps Mission to India during the war, was the India Committee's most dominant member and, according to Listowel, it was Cripps, rather than Attlee, who first suggested Mountbatten as Viceroy. As Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, since 1943, Mountbatten had won the respect and trust of the popular nationalist leadership in India and Burma, a factor perceived to be of key importance in his qualifications to succeed.

In April 1947, after the terms of Mountbatten's Viceroyalty had been agreed, Listowel, at Mountbatten's request, replaced Lord Pethick-Lawrence as Secretary of State for India. The India Independence Bill was introduced into the Commons on 4 July, and Listowel then steered it through the Lords, unamended, by the end of the month. With Parliament's impending summer recess, any amendment would have jeopardised the timetable for independence on 15 August.

Although invited to Balmoral to receive King George VI's personal thanks for providing over India's transition to independence, Listowel received no other honour. When asked by the King how he was to be recognised for his contribution, Listowel replied with characteristic modesty that he was too junior a member of the Cabinet to merit recognition. He also had to apologise for not returning his seals of office, which the India Office had lost.

As Secretary of State for India, Listowel's duties extended to Burma, for which he remained Secretary of State until independence in early 1948. The move towards self-rule in Burma was already well under way. In April 1947 Aung San's party gained a respectable majority in the country's elections and almost all the seats in Burma's Constituent Assembly. In June the assembly approved a resolution proposing a republican constitution.

A month later, in July, Listowel was invited to receive the news that Aung San, the first



More social reformer than socialist: Listowel, left, receives Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi, 1947

Photograph: Hulton Getty

Burman since the 18th century to unite his country behind him, had been shot dead, together with most of his ministers, on the orders of his disaffected opponent U Saw. The transition to independence moved forward none the less. Listowel again steering the necessary legislation through the Lords, culminating in independence on 4 January 1948.

Listowel's next appointment was as Minister of State for the Colonies, a post he regarded as a generous reward for his work at the India Office. Ministerial responsibility for the British Empire was then divided up into three geographical areas, of which Listowel was assigned South-East Asia and the West Indies. One of his first duties was to go to Malaya to preside over the inaugural session of the

Federal Legislative Council, the first step towards that country's eventual self-government.

During a tour of the West Indies Listowel invited all the local British governors to Barbados for a meeting - the first time they had met. He visited Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, British Guiana, British Honduras, and the Windward and Leeward Islands. Visiting the last, Listowel was distressed to find that the Governor, Oliver Baldwin, son of the former Conservative prime minister, had fallen out with local British residents by airing his revolutionary socialist views. Deep in the jungle of British Guiana, Listowel was astonished to discover Amerindian schoolchildren learning English from a textbook which opened with the words, "The Scottish nobleman strode

out of his castle into the snow." In 1957 Listowel received an invitation from Kwame Nkrumah, the socialist Prime Minister of Ghana, to succeed Sir Charles Arden-Clark as Ghana's Governor-General. Nkrumah had encountered Listowel in London, and was familiar with his activities as a member of the Fabian Society Colonial Bureau.

Listowel looked back on the three years he spent in Ghana as especially happy. "As Governor-General," he reflected, "everybody is nice to you. You have no enemies or carping critics." He was scrupulous in remaining above politics and when Nkrumah, prior to an overseas tour, asked him to select one of two Ministers, neither of whom Nkrumah wished to offend, to act as deputy in his absence, Listowel

unhesitatingly declined to assist.

Listowel got to know Nkrumah well, and was struck by his devotion to the Queen. Greeting Listowel on his arrival in Accra, Nkrumah's first words were "When is the Queen coming to Ghana?" When the question of honouring Nkrumah arose, Listowel recommended he be made a Privy Counsellor, an honour which was received with delight. One of the happiest experiences of Nkrumah's life, Listowel judged, was the few days he once spent at Balmoral.

While in Ghana Listowel visited all the country's five Regions every year. In spite of the technically informal nature of these visits, Listowel was welcomed by each of the Regions' Paramount Chiefs in full regalia, with traditional dancing. He enjoyed a notable success in restoring relations between Nkrumah and the Chief of the Ashanti - whose people had stoned Nkrumah on a visit he made to Kumasi - by arranging for them to meet at the races in Accra.

In 1960, some months after the Duke of Edinburgh's successful visit to Ghana (Listowel observed that no other visitor to Ghana during his time there received such a rapturous reception), Ghana became an independent republic within the Commonwealth. Due to a mechanical fault, Listowel's plane, scheduled to leave Ghana two hours before the country became a republic, took off only minutes before the deadline expired, thus narrowly avoiding a constitutional crisis.

As Chairman of Committees in the House of Lords from 1965 to 1976, Listowel adhered strictly to the apolitical line demanded by the post. For many years afterwards he continued to sit on the Woolsack as one of the Lord Coadjutors, Deputy Speaker. Describing his stance, in later life, as "more social reformer than socialist", he maintained a keen interest in foreign and Commonwealth affairs, human rights, and Third World aid.

George Ireland

William Francis Hare, politician: born 28 September 1906; styled as Viscount Ennismore 1924-31; succeeded 1931 as fifth Earl of Listowel; Member (Labour), LCC for Battersea North 1952-57; Labour Chief Whip, House of Lords 1941-44; Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, India Office, and Deputy Leader, House of Lords 1944-45; Postmaster General, 1945-47; PC 1946; Secretary of State for India 1947, and Burma 1947-48; Minister of State for the Colonies 1948-50; Parliamentary Secretary, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries 1950-51; Governor-General of Ghana 1957-60; GCMG 1957; Chairman of Committees, House of Lords 1965-76; Deputy Speaker, House of Lords 1976; married 1933 Judith de Morfy-Mantoux (one daughter; marriage dissolved 1945); 1958 Stephanie Currie (née Wise; one daughter; marriage dissolved 1963); 1963 Pamela Read (née Day; two sons, one daughter); died London 12 March 1997.



Nation with a Dalek. The monster made him a wealthy man

In the 1960s and 1970s, Terry Nation was one Britain's most prolific and successful writers for television. But he will be best remembered as the creator of the Daleks, the sinister mechanical monsters that proved to be Dr Who's most menacing and durable opponents and, happily for their inventor, the most commercially popular.

His inspiration for the Daleks, whose mechanised bodies appear to glide across the ground, came from watching the Georgian State dance troupe on television. The female dancers, with their long voluminous skirts, seemed to have no legs as they smoothly criss-crossed the stage. The Daleks were an instant success with the viewing audience and returned to threaten the good doctor in series after series, as well as on the

big screen. They also gave rise to a spectacular range of merchandising spin-offs that made their creator a wealthy man. One spin-off that brought no royalties but pleased him enormously was the inclusion of the word "Dalek" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Born in Cardiff, Nation began his professional career as a stand-up comedian, but, though audiences liked his jokes, they did not much care for the way he told them, so he became a scriptwriter instead. In 1955, in his mid-twenties, he moved to London and joined Associated London Scripts, whose stable of writers included Spike Milligan, Johnny Speight, Ray Simpson and Alan Gaiton - Tony Hancock's writing team. Terry Nation was to write some 200 radio comedy scripts for the

likes of Harry Worth, Eric Sykes and Frankie Howerd, before moving to television.

When Tony Hancock dropped Gaiton and Simpson, Nation was one of the writers to whom he turned. Their collaboration was a friendly if sometimes frantic one, but did little to reverse the slide in Hancock's fortunes. It was around about this time, in 1963, that Nation was invited to write some episodes for a new television series, *Dr Who*, the brainchild of Sydney Newman, head of BBC television drama. His initial inclination was to turn down the offer, being firmly of the view that the programme was destined for the scrapheap. Changing his mind and taking the job, he said later, was the shrewdest move he ever made.

He now all but abandoned

comedy for popular television drama. Throughout the Sixties he wrote for one successful *Law Grade* series after another - *The Saint*, *The Baron*, *The Avengers*, *The Persuaders* - rising through the ranks to become script editor and associate producer on the later programmes. The hallmark of a Terry Nation screenplay was a crisp, imaginative plot, laced with sharp, witty dialogue. However intense the drama, humour was seldom far away, and always used to good effect.

By the early Seventies he felt able to branch out on projects of his own. With Clive Exton he wrote and produced a feature film, *The House in Nightmare Park* (1973), starring Frankie Howerd and Ray Milland (a former pupil at Nation's school in Cardiff), a comedy thriller

which unashamedly tipped its hat at the 1939 Bob Hope classic *The Cat and the Canary*. For television he created the series *Survivors*, the story of a group of people who survive a killer virus which wipes out most of the world's population. This was followed by *Blake's Seven*, the intergalactic adventures of a band of outcasts. Like *Dr Who*, the latter developed a cult following.

The project that gave him the most pleasure, however, was his children's book *Rebecca's World* (1975), a wonderfully imaginative adventure story named after his daughter. A best-seller in the UK, the book was also published in several other countries, including the United States.

In 1979, Terry Nation fulfilled a long-time ambition to work in

Hollywood, settling there with his wife Kate and their children, Rebecca and Joel. In the years that followed he worked for Columbia, 20th Century Fox and MGM, developing programme ideas and script doctoring, but never managed to repeat the success he had enjoyed in Britain. His final few years were dogged by ill-health in the form of emphysema.

Nation had an attractive quality of self-deprecating humour and liked nothing better than to reduce his family and friends to helpless laughter, preferably over a drink or two.

Graham Tarrant

Terry Nation, writer: born Cardiff 8 August 1930; married 1948 Kate Gaunt (one son, one daughter); died Los Angeles 9 March 1997.

Ossie O'Brien

Ossie O'Brien was an MP for 11 weeks and one day. Yet, during the Darlington by-election, the curtain-raiser to the 1983 general election, and in his fleeting days as an MP he won the affection of his colleagues. Roy Hattersley described him as the best by-election candidate of the decade.

He was born Oswald O'Brien into a family of teachers in 1925, in Darlington. From St Mary's Grammar School he went to

Faircroft College and Durham University before National Service in the Navy.

After experience in a number of heavy industries in the north of England he became a Workers' Educational Association tutor and an immensely popular staff tutor at Durham University. In 1966 he had the ill luck to lose by one vote at the selection conference of the Labour Party in Darlington. In his maiden and only speech, on

14 April 1983, he said with a chuckle.

My entry to the House at this time however is inevitably tinged with sadness and regret, as it results from the death of my much-loved and respected colleague and predecessor, Ted Fletcher. Many honourable members will not know, although some Labour members know, that in 1982 I was beaten by Ted Fletcher at the Darlington nomination by the narrowest possible margin. Legend has it that it was a majority of one. Nevertheless, we worked amicably together over successive elections.

Ted Fletcher's record speaks for itself. He served the people of Darlington for more than 18 years and was working on constituents' problems until shortly before his death. I recall him telephoning me just a few days before he died and insisting that even if he could not go to London and to the House he could at least write letters to ministers and to government departments.

Ossie O'Brien put all personal disappointments to the back of his mind for the sake of the cause of the Labour Party.

Those who took part in the campaign will never forget the bitterly cold by-election of 24 March 1983 among the warm-hearted people of Darlington. O'Brien scored 20,544 to the 18,132 of Michael Fallon and the 12,735 of Alan Cook standing for the Social Democrat Party. However 78 days later the situation was to be reversed and Fallon went on to a ministerial career, saving old challenges from O'Brien in 1987.

After he left Parliament O'Brien worked for Alcohol Concern and contributed to the literature considering the increasing problem of drugs in society. But for the verdict of the electorate and the ill luck 18 years earlier of such a close selection conference result, he would undoubtedly have made a serious contribution to Parliament in the field of education and training.

Tam Dalyell

Oswald O'Brien, politician and teacher: born Darlington 6 April 1928; Staff Tutor, Durham University 1964-78; Director of Studies and Vice-Principal, Cooperative College 1978-83; Chairman, Society of Industrial Tutors 1978-82; MP (Labour) for Darlington 1983; Director, Education Division, Alcohol Concern 1984-86; Director, Workplace Advisory Service 1986-97; married 1950 Freda Pascoe (one son); died Darlington 10 March 1997.



O'Brien: 78 days in Parliament

Births, Marriages & Deaths

BIRTHS

SUTTON: To Michelle (née Chiles) and Peter, a son, Robert Edward, on 3 March 1997.

DEATHS

BROWNING: Robert, died peacefully in the Royal Free Hospital, on 11 March. Funeral to take place on Thursday 20 March, 1pm, at Golders Green Crematorium, Equities in J.H. Kenyon, 0171-794 3535.

IN MEMORIAM

WATTS: Stephen Glass, writer and journalist, born Glasgow 1912, died Surrey 1996. Always remembered. For Gazette: BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS, please telephone 01753-291 2812.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Duke of Kent, Prince Charles, Prince William, Prince Harry and Prince Louis, will be married to the Duke of Kent's daughter, Princess Alexandra, on 10 June 1997. The wedding will take place at the Palace of St James, London. The Duke of Kent is the son of the Queen Mother and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Birthdays

Miss Valerie Amos, former Chief Executive, Equal Opportunities Commission, 43; Lord Borrie QC, former Director-General of Fair Trading, 66; Mr Terence Brady, playwright, novelist and actor, 88; Lord Butterworth, former Vice-Chancellor, Warwick University, 79; Sir Michael Checkland, former Director-General of the BBC, 61; Miss Lesley Collier, ballerina, 50; Mr James Marshall MP, 56; Sir Henry Neville, former Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, 77; Dr David Peace, glass engraver and town planner, 82; Air Commodore Helen Renton, former director, WRAF, 66; Mr Neil Sedaka, songwriter and singer, 58; Mr Peter Viggo, MP, 59.

Anniversaries

Births: Charles Grey, second Earl Grey, former prime minister, 1764; George Selkirk, poet and diplomat, 1900. Deaths: Richard Burtage, actor, 1619; Tsar Alexander II of Russia, assassinated 1881; Angela Brazil, writer, 1947. On this day, as predicted by Halley in 1682, Halley's Comet came to its perihelion, 1758; the So-

viet Congress voted to abolish the political monopoly of the Communist party, 1980. Today is the Feast Day of St Anselm, St Euphrasia of Euphrasia, St Gerald of Mayo, St Hildrad, St Mochoemne, St Nephorus of Constantinople and Saints Roderic and Salomon.

Lectures

National Gallery: Mari Griffith, "Monet (II): Transposing with Monet", 1pm. Victoria and Albert Museum: Clare Ford-Willa, "Antonio Rosellini and the Later 15th Century", 2.30pm. Tate Gallery: Justine Hopkins, "The Proper Study of Mankind: transformations of the human figure (II)", 1pm. British Museum: Lucy Goodison, "Prehistoric Cretan Supremacy: palaces, settlements and shrines", 1.15pm. National Portrait Gallery: Liz Rideal, "Jacob Epstein", 1.10pm. Gresham College: Professor Simon Lee, "Judging the Seaman Report (on Northern Ireland, Red Lion Square and Britain)", 5.30pm. Leicester University: Professor Judith McKernie, "Lustrine Records and Climate Change", 4.15pm. Professor Aubrey Newman, "Teaching and Researching the Holocaust Fifty Years On", 5.15pm.

Preston and others v Wolverhampton Healthcare NHS Trust and others; Fletcher and others v Midland Bank plc; Court of Appeal (Lord Justice Waite, Lord Justice Otton, Lord Justice Schiemann) 13 February 1997

Women part-time workers who had not until recently appreciated or been advised that their exclusion from occupational pension schemes was unlawful under European Community law were nevertheless time-barred from pursuing complaints after the expiry of the six-month limitation period imposed by section 2(4) of the Equal Pay Act 1970.

The Court of Appeal dismissed appeals by a number of women employees against preliminary rulings by the Employment Appeal Tribunal. The women claimed that as part-time or former part-time employees, doing jobs predominantly done by women, they were indirectly discriminated against by being denied access to contributory and non-contributory pension schemes for which full-time employees were eligible. This was done by making membership of the schemes conditional upon a minimum number of hours worked per week.

Such discrimination was permissible under domestic law until the coming into force of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Equal Access to Membership) Amendment Regulations 1995. Before then, though permissible under domestic law, it was unlawful under European Community law (see *Vroege and Fischer* (Case C-57/93) [1994] ECR I-4541).

Right of access to a pension scheme has been held to constitute part of pay for the purposes of article 119 of the EC Treaty, under which member

LAW REPORT

13 March 1997

states "shall... maintain the application of the principle that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work", and of the Equal Pay Directive (75/117/EC).

The question was whether the existence of the six-month limitation period for equal pay claims under section 2(4) and the two-year limit on compensation in section 2(5) of the Equal Pay Act prevented the employees now enforcing rights under community law of which, during the relevant periods, they were unaware they possessed.

John Conaghan (Union: Graham Clayton, Reynolds Porter Chambers, Michael Scott & Co) for the employees in the first case; Geneva Caws QC, Clive Lewis and Tim Kerr (Everheds, Norton Rose, Manchester City Council, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Wolverhampton Met-

ropolitan Borough Council, Birmingham City Council, Lancashire County Council) for the employers; Jane McNeill (Layford & Co) for the employees in the second case; Patrick Elias QC and Jason Coppell (Booth & Co, Leeds) for the employers. Nicholas Paines (Treasury Solicitor) for the Secretary of State.

Lord Justice Schiemann said the fact that there had not until recently been widespread appreciation of the fact that community law gave a right not to be discriminated against in respect of pension schemes did not mean that it was impossible in practice to start proceedings within the six-month limitation period imposed by section 2(4) of the 1970 Act, so as to justify the court disapplying the limitation provisions.

The appellants had always

been possessed of the relevant rights and could have asserted them. As a matter of English law, the courts would have to give precedence to any directly effective community right and disregard any provision of domestic law purporting to exclude or limit that community right: see *Biggs v Somerset* [1996] ICR 364 at 374 to 376.

In relation to the two-year limit on back compensation for lost pay under section 2(5) of the 1970 Act, it was fair to say that anyone now trying to enter a pension scheme to which, on its face, they were denied entry years ago, would not be credited with all their years' service. But this was because they did not invoke their rights under article 119 soon enough. They were thus in a situation which was typical of anyone faced with a limitation period who had let time slip by for perfectly understandable reasons.

Paul Magrath, Barrister

business & city

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BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

NatWest to announce disciplinary measures over £50m loss ■ SFA confirms it is looking into Warburg share sale

City bonus bonanza keeps on rolling

Jeremy Warner and Michael Harrison

Two of the City's leading investment banks yesterday unveiled big increases in bonus payments, fuelling fears that bumper payouts may encourage risk-taking of the kind recently criticised by the Bank of England.

Schroders said that staff costs last year rose by £109m to £464m – an increase of 30 per cent. About half the increase was due to the payment of higher bonuses after the bank earned record profits of £239m.

Meanwhile SBC Warburg, the Swiss-owned investment bank, disclosed that costs last year had risen by a third to £2.6bn (£1.63bn), an increase blamed partly on "performance related compensation".

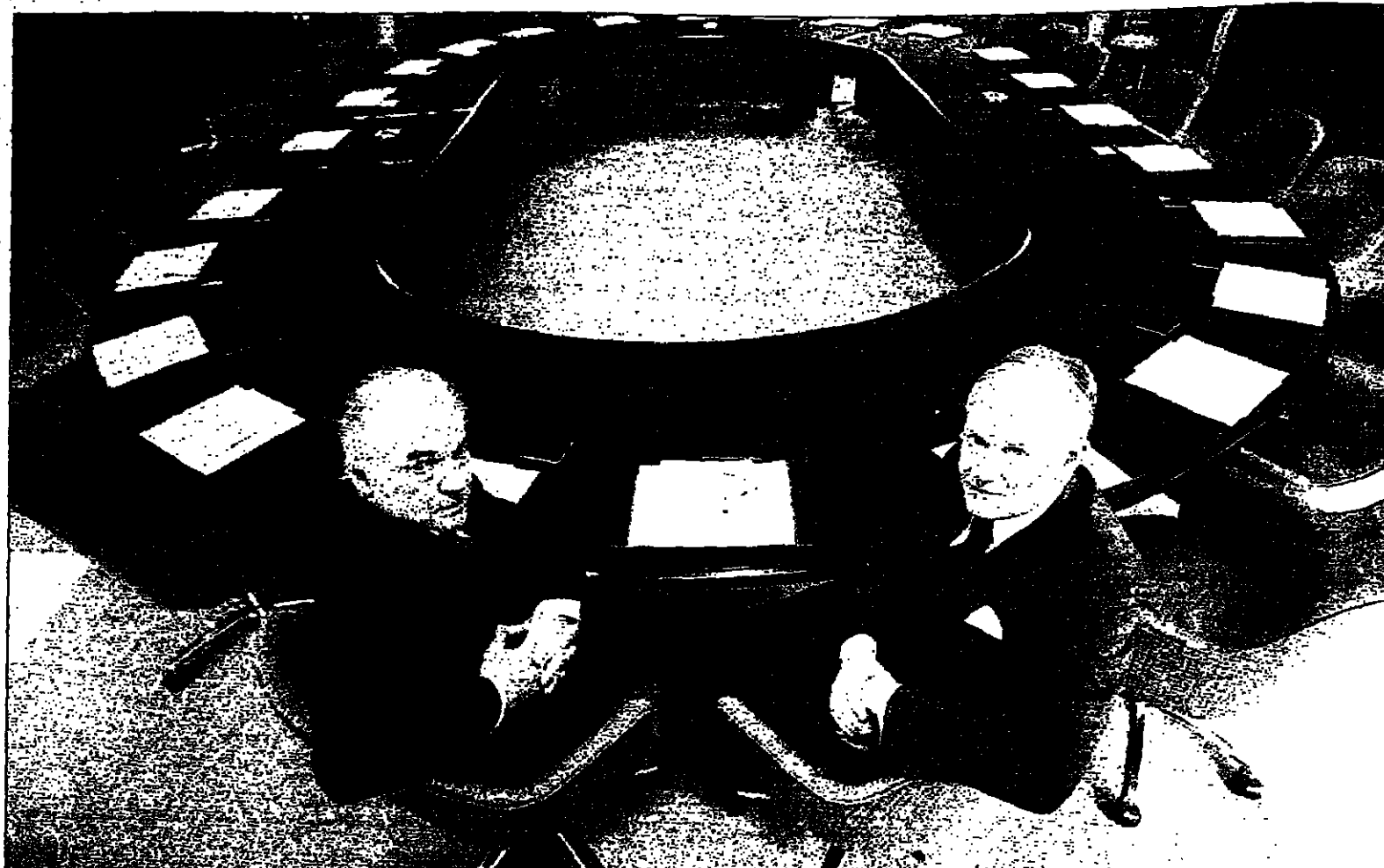
While traders at Schroders and SBC Warburg are enjoying bonuses running into six figures in many cases, NatWest is today expected to announce disciplinary measures, including bonus cuts, reprimands and dismissals, following the discovery of a £50m hole in its interest rate options department.

The derivatives trader allegedly responsible for the loss, Kyriacos Papouis, has since resigned from his new employers Bear Sterns while a senior trader, Neil Dodgeson, has been suspended by NatWest for failure to supervise pending an internal inquiry.

Further disciplinary action is expected today following the completion of the inquiry by the accountants Coopers and Lybrand and the lawyers Linklaters and Paines.

Schroders disclosed that staff costs per employee last year rose from £78,500 to £93,300 as the bank took on an extra 1,450 employees. The ratio of staff costs to income rose from 44.4 per cent to 48.5 per cent. However, pre-tax profits per employee also rose from £43,600 to £48,000.

Win Bischoff, chairman of the bank, said that what the Bank of England had said about the dangers of the City's bonus culture was "a useful adjunct to the debate". But he stressed that Schroders operated a deferred bonus scheme and had done so for several years.



Bonus debate: Schroders' vice chairman Peter Sedgwick (left) and chairman Win Bischoff yesterday

Photograph: Brendan Carr/FT

The increase in bonuses at SBC Warburg was also accompanied by a 55 per cent increase in profits to £607m and a big improvement in its return on capital to 16.4 per cent.

However, the results were marred by confirmation from the Securities and Futures Authority that it was investigating the alleged mishandling by Warburg of a large share sale last year. At least two senior traders have already been disciplined over the episode.

Peter Corrigan, head of French equities, resigned last week and a derivatives trader has also left.

The allegations revolve around the liquidation of the Kleinwort Benson European Privatisation Investment Trust (Kepit) late last year. Warburg was accused by Merrill Lynch, acting for Kepit, of deliberately marking down the prices of the shares just ahead of executing the trade, so disadvantaging the client to its own benefit.

As reported by *The Independent* at the time, the affair was quickly settled to Kepit's satisfaction after Warburg agreed to pay more advantageous prices, at a cost to itself of £3m-£5m.

Warburg said yesterday that as soon as it became aware of the allegations an immediate investigation was launched by its compliance department and the bank quickly moved to ensure the client had not been disadvantaged. It confirmed that the outcome of its deliberations

had resulted in the departure from the bank of two traders.

At the time *The Independent* quoted a Warburg source as saying "It's no big deal. This sort of thing happens the whole time. This was a programme trade. The timing had been pre-set and it was unfortunate that it occurred when prices were weak as a result of a rise in interest rates".

However, Merrill Lynch and others were persistent in their allegation that the prices had been deliberately depressed by

market makers and called on the SFA to investigate.

SBC Warburg is now part of Swiss Bank Corporation, which coincidentally announced a 29 per cent leap in total gross operating profits last year to \$2.9bn. However, the company said that as a result of a new methodology for accounting for credit provisions and a change in property valuation practices, "the result for the year is a one off technical loss of \$1.5bn".

Comment, page 21

Call for minimum EU tax on savings

Yvette Cooper

French and German finance ministers yesterday called for an EU-wide minimum tax on financial investments, a move which is fiercely opposed by the UK Government.

Jean Arthuis, the French finance minister, said the EU should agree a code of good conduct to eliminate the risk of unfair competition between member states for tax revenues. Speaking after bilateral talks in Lyon between the French and German finance ministers and central bankers, Mr Arthuis said: "We are determined to put active pressure on the European Commission to have this code of good conduct in place rapidly. We cannot tolerate these forms of unfair competition. It is the future of the European Union which is at stake."

A new EU taxation policy group, charged with exploring possibilities for co-ordination of tax policy, met on Tuesday. Tax competition was the main topic of discussion. A spokesman for Commissioner Mario Monti, chairman of the group, said: "We are not at this stage considering legislation. We hope instead to achieve a political consensus over tax co-ordination in a series of areas."

The French, German and Belgian governments are concerned about the differences between taxes on capital in EU countries. Germany in particular fears that savers are slipping across the border to set up savings accounts in Luxembourg which, like the UK, has no withholding tax on interest from savings. Another fear is that tax competition will push capital and corporation taxes down across Europe, forcing member states to raise taxes on employment instead, thereby threatening jobs.

But the chances of EU-wide measures being introduced to tackle the problem look slim. Tax policy is not covered by qualified majority voting, so EU proposals can be vetoed by any country.

A spokesman for the Treasury said: "We are strongly opposed to a minimum withholding tax, and to anything which would be a threat to London as a financial centre. If Germany has a problem with tax competition from Luxembourg that is for them to sort out themselves."

Iceland tries to thaw out critics with buy-back

Patrick Toole

Iceland yesterday unveiled plans to buy back more than a third of its shares as the struggling frozen food retailer reported its first drop in profits in 26 years.

News of the capital consolidation gave a much-needed boost to Iceland's shares, which have been in virtual free fall since they hit a high of 248p four years ago. Last night they closed at 99.5p, up 12p.

However, analysts were

unimpressed. "It is a short-term expedient not a long-term solution," said Frank Davidson at James Capel. "All they are doing is introducing a degree of financial leverage on the business. If I were a shareholder I would either vote against the proposal or sell the shares."

The operation to buy three out of every eight shares at 105p will reduce Iceland's issued equity by 35 per cent.

Malcolm Walker, Iceland's chairman and chief executive, said the buyback should be

welcomed by investors. "Sellers can get out at a premium. I think we will end up with a more supportive shareholder register. It is the second time Iceland has returned cash to shareholders. A year ago it spent £42m to buy back 27 million of its own shares."

Mr Walker admitted that Iceland's directors had considered a management buyout because of frustration at the company's low rating on the stock market.

"We'd have been mad not to, it was looking so cheap," he said.

"But nobody likes the idea of a de-listing. If you look at the likes of Branson or Lloyd Webber who took their companies private they had a big slug of the equity. We only have 6.5 per cent. It was never really going to be a runner."

Mr Walker was speaking after Iceland reported a drop in pre-tax profits from £7.6m to £5.6m in the year to 28 December, breaking a 25-year record of uninterrupted growth. Sales grew by 3.8 per cent to £1.47bn, though like-for-like

volumes fell by an estimated 1.2 per cent. Earnings per share dropped from 17.1p to 13.2p, though the dividend was raised by 2.9 pence to 5.4p.

City-based Iceland has seen its share of retail food market eroded as larger supermarket rivals such as Tesco, Sainsbury and Safeway matched its lower prices, stayed open for longer and introduced marketing initiatives like loyalty cards. Iceland has also felt the chill from the trend to out-of-town stores and the move by bigger

chains to introduce frozen food ranges of their own.

BZW is arranging a £285m loan facility to support the proposed capital reduction, according to banking sources. About £118m of the loan will be used to fund the buyback.

The loan facility, which has been fully underwritten by Barclays Bank, will also be used to refinance existing credit lines following the capital reconstruction. An additional tranche will provide working capital. BZW will ask some of

Iceland's existing banks to join the deal as sub-underwriters.

Iceland plans to create 1,000 jobs from the launch of a new home delivery service. The service has already been tested in Chester, Portsmouth and the North-east of England, resulting in "very encouraging sales increases", said Mr Walker. It will now be extended nationwide. Customers will be offered free delivery by for purchases of £25 or more within a 10 mile radius of its stores.

Investment Column, page 20

Strong pound to hit results, Reed warns

Tom Stevenson

City Editor

Reed became the latest victim of the strength of sterling yesterday, warning that the high-yielding pound would peg back profits in the first half of this year. Analysts took the red pen to forecasts and the shares slipped 17p to 1.156.5p despite a 1.2 per cent rise in underlying profits in the year to December and the promise that Reed's consumer books arm will soon be back on the block.

Reed withdrew its consumer books division from the market two years ago after an auction attracted bids of £70m-£80m, much less than the company had hoped to raise. It recently sold a portfolio of some of the business's best-known imprints to Random House for about £20m, but said yesterday it was confident the remaining reference, illustrated and children's

books would soon be attractive enough to achieve a sensible price.

Profits last year of £806m were up from 1995's £736m but at the bottom end of analysts' expectations. Forecasts for the current year were reined in to about £865m as analysts predicted underlying growth of around 10 per cent would be held back to about half as much by currency factors.

Nigel Stapleton, deputy chairman, said: "The strength of sterling in recent months will, if sustained, have a marked effect on the Reed Elsevier combined businesses' reported results this year, particularly in the first half."

Earnings per share in the year to December were 9 pence higher at 56.2p and the dividend was increased by 11 pence to 27.2p.

A two-for-one share split will become effective in May in a bid



Nigel Stapleton: Electronic publishing could be costly

to reduce the currently heavy share price.

Mr Stapleton also warned that recent impressive increases in operating margin would be held back by the cost of expanding the company's moves into electronic publishing.

He said a fifth of Reed's revenues came from electronic information dissemination such as services provided to American lawyers by its successful recent acquisition, Lexis-Nexis, and the company had set a medium-term target of 35 to 40 per cent.

During the year there was a 1.6 percentage point improvement in operating margin to 25.3 per cent.

Investment Column, page 20

Unions' company hit list banks on Labour win

Barrie Clement

Labour Editor

Evidence emerged yesterday that unions are drawing up hit lists of companies in anticipation of "union-friendly" legislation to be passed by a Labour government.

Union officials are targeting individual organisations and industrial sectors in preparation for the introduction of a law enforcing recognition where more than 50 per cent of employees vote for it.

The MSF white collar union yesterday announced the intention to "organise" employees in the North Sea oil industry. Roger Spiller, the union's national offshore secretary, pointed out that BP, Conoco, Mobil and Marathon were all resisting recognition but were now the subject of a new campaign by MSF.

The union also claimed yesterday that it had won negotiating rights at Elf's North Sea subsidiary after a 99.4 per cent vote in favour of recognition in

a ballot organised by conciliation service Acas. Of 183 ballot papers issued, 159 returned votes in favour of union rights, with one spoiled paper and none against. It was the first vote taken in advance of Labour legislation and could mean that other ballots will be held elsewhere in advance of the law being passed and to avoid any possible litigation.

Roger Lyons, general secretary of MSF, said the vote was also held as a result of an initiative taken by the works council, set up under European law. Representatives from France and Sweden on the council backed the idea of a ballot among British employees on the grounds that the company should have a "democratic attitude" to all its employees irrespective of nationality.

The latest issue of MSF Report, the union's journal, points out that the vote for recognition was achieved despite Elf's insistence that offshore workers did not want to be represented by a union. The union however

now argues that Elf employees at the Piper Bravo platform – sister to Piper Alpha where more than 160 workers were killed in an explosion – together with colleagues at the Claymore and Salthill rigs had now secured full union rights.

An Elf spokeswoman said yesterday that the union would still have to prove that half or more of employees were fully paid-up members of MSF. "It is one thing to vote for recognition, quite another to be a union member," she said.

Mr Spiller said the union would be stepping up its campaign elsewhere in the sector where British unions had consistently failed to secure a foothold. It is understood the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union is also targeting the offshore industry in a campaign to win negotiating rights.

Mr Lyons said the union intended to take "full advantage" of the new atmosphere which would be created by a Labour government.

Barclays finally sells disastrous property firm

Tom Stevenson

City Editor

Barclays finally drew a line under one of its most disastrous loans yesterday after it sold Imry, the property developer it has owned by default since the company's collapse in 1991.

During the dark days of the recession Imry came to symbolise Barclays' hubris in becoming the biggest lender of any high street bank to the previously high-flying property sector.

Imry, which owns the Shires shopping centre in Leicester, was acquired yesterday by Dutch property company Rodamco for £249m. The deal follows weeks of speculation which had paired Imry with Elliott Bernerd's Chelsfield and Capital shopping centres.

Both companies already own shopping centres, widely viewed as the property sector's hottest assets, but are understood to have been unprepared to enter a bidding war with Rodamco. The deal is the first UK acquisition for the Dutch company which launched an unsuccessful bid at Hammerson in 1989.

Barclays has always made clear it was holding Imry solely for the purpose of selling it once the property market recovered. Banks that inherit property companies by default during recessions have gained the reputation for selling those unwanted assets at the bottom of the market after rushing lending to them at the peak of the previous boom.

Barclays attempted to buck that trend by restructuring the company in 1992 to allow its management to operate it out of recession.

Imry is Barclays' most spectacular property disaster, having cost it £240m in provisions

to date. In 1989, the bank financed a £314m takeover of the quoted company by Mark Ketchell, a vehicle backed by Eagle Star, Development & Realisation Trust, Prudential-Bache and Wolfgang Stoelzberg, a private investor. Barclays provided loans of more than £200m to support the venture. Then, in June 1991, the bank's exposure was doubled in a restructuring to about £420m.

In early 1993 Barclays revealed had debt provisions of £2.5bn, including £1bn to cover its ambitious foray into commercial property during the previous five years. The property boom of the late 1980s was backed by more than £40bn of bank debt and Barclays, of all the clearing banks, was the heaviest lender.

It provided large corporate loans to high-profile and aggressive property developers, such as Olympia & York, Spayhawk and Imry, much of it at the peak of the boom.

Barclays excelled at what is known as relationship banking, and backed such individuals as Gerald Ronson, of Heron International, Spayhawk's Trevor Osborne and Martin Myers at Imry. The rationale was that these men were talented businessmen and would make money for themselves and for Barclays.

A spokesman yesterday said there was no danger of Barclays repeating the mistakes of the 1980s, claiming it had sophisticated, computerised risk-assessment systems to prevent foolhardy lending. Since 1992 there has been a 57 per cent reduction in the size of Barclays' property lending book, which now accounts for 7.6 per cent of total lending compared with 12.2 per cent four years ago.

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change/01	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol	Yield/01	Div	Yield/01
FTSE 100	4422.50	-21.80	-0.5	4444.30	3822.30	3.84			
FTSE 250	4725.10	-1.30	-0.1	4729.40	4015.30	3.34			
FTSE 350	2185.40	-8.90	-0.4	2191.30	1816.80	3.58			
FTSE SmallCap	2374.20	+3.34	+0.1	2374.20	1954.06	2.89			
FTSE All-Share	2156.05	-7.89	-0.4	2163.84	1791.85	3.52			
New York	7017.85	-7.91	-0.1	7085.16	5082.94	1.89			
Dax	18183.27	-94.45	-0.5	22666.80	17303.65	0.891			
Hong Kong	13119.12	-123.07	-1.0	13868.24	10204.87	3.211			
Frankfurt	3415.40	-45.19	-1.3	3480.84	2253.36	1.427			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond	Money Market Rates	Bond Yields	1 Month	1 Year	Medium Term	Long Term	Yield/01
UK	5.00	6.68	7.31	8.19	7.40	8.31			
US	5.31	6.03	6.58	8.38	6.85	6.72			
Japan	0.41	0.47	2.30	2.23					
Germany	3.25	3.34	5.67	6.60	6.45				

CURRENCIES									
£/\$	£/DM	£/¥	\$/S	\$/DM	\$/¥	\$/£	DM/£	¥/£	¥/\$
1.00	1.66	160.3	0.69	0.55	106.6	0.70	0.55	106.6	148.3
1.00	1.66	160.3	0.69	0.55	106.6	0.70	0.55	106.6	148.3

Source: Reuters

Reed achieves impressive margins

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Yesterday's 17p fall in Reed International's share price to 1156.5p might be seen as a pretty cheerful reaction to a 12 per cent rise in profits from continuing operations, yet another rise in the publishing group's trading margin to an impressive 25.5 per cent and a flawless conversion of profits into the hard cash that is the lifeblood of any business.

The 11 per cent rise in headline pre-tax profits to £805m was at the bottom end of analysts' expectations, but it represents an enviable progression from the £435m achieved five years ago. Earnings per share of 56.2p rose from last year's 51.7p and the dividend rose in line with profits to 27.2p.

The fall reflected two concerns. First, that the relentless increase in Reed International's return on sales is reaching a plateau. Second, that the recent strength of sterling will hit profits, especially in the first half of this year.

Both worries are real, but they should not distract from the underlying strength of Reed's, but increasingly powerful, portfolio of printed and electronic products.

Four years ago, Reed was making 20 per cent on its sales and boldly set out its stall to increase that to 25 per cent within five years. It has reached that benchmark early thanks to careful pruning of its lower-margin products, a focus on the higher return activities and cost-cutting.

Plainly, with returns of more than 40 per cent in scientific journals and only 15 per cent in what remains of Reed's consumer products there remains scope for rebalancing the margin mix upwards. The company is open, however, about the depressing effect on margins that continuing investment in the transition to electronic delivery of information will entail. The days of year in, year out margin growth are over.

The trick now is to grow the top line, which means more of the organic growth that characterised last year and an acceleration of the acquisitions that have already involved Reed spending £450m in the past year or so. With net borrowings of £200m, interest cover of 17 times and free cash flow last year of £300m Reed is blessed with an awesome war chest if it can find the right company at the right price.

What Reed really needs is to find another Lexis-Nexis to buy. The US publisher of legal information saw margins rise another 3 percentage points to 23 per cent, more than twice the return it was making when acquired. A 10 per cent rise in sales led to an impressive 29 per cent profit rise.

On the basis of slightly downgraded profits this year of about £865m, the

shares trade on a prospective price-earnings ratio of 19. That's a hefty premium to the market, which, despite Reed's high quality of earnings, is barely warranted by the rate of profits growth. Hold.

Aerospace takes off at TI

TI has been one of Britain's few candidates in the engineering industry worth the title "world class". Few in the sector can boast the scale-to-landing gear group's six-year record of consistent underlying profits growth and 12 years of dividend increases, achieved under veteran chairman Sir Christopher Lewinton. Yesterday's figures, boring in their predictability, continued that trend, showing all parts of the business firing on all cylinders.

The 16 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £211m before £21.1m of net exceptional gains from the disposal of four small engineering operations looks highly respectable. TI's market leadership shone through in the results of its John

Crane and Bundy operations. In the former, Crane's world-wide reach is allowing it to cash in on the increasing demand by customers for single suppliers. It has signed up 50 partnership agreements so far, including six this year. The underlying 13 per cent growth in profits to £97m was ahead of both a flat market for its process industry customers and its own sales increase.

Meanwhile, Bundy struggled off flat or falling automotive markets in North America and Europe to record a 13 per cent underlying profit to £79m last year. That gives confidence that it will continue to prosper in the similar markets expected for 1997.

This year will see the first real contribution from Forsheda, the Swedish polymer engineering company controversially acquired by TI in November for £189m. That could chip in £14m to £15m in 1997, according to Hoare Govett.

But the main story this year should be the aerospace side. Much criticised for overpaying for Dowty in 1992, that business is storming ahead on the back of the doubling and tripling of aero-plane orders at Boeing and Airbus last year. Worth up to \$2m a time for

Dowty, that adds up to around £500m of business for the group and the orders are still rolling in.

Another £220m or so of bolt-on acquisitions will keep the pot boiling this year, even if currency could represent a £5m to £7m hit, according to Hoare Govett.

On that broker's forecast of £238m, the shares, up 12p at 576p, stand on a forward multiple of 17. A firm hold.

Iceland moves to warm hearts

Just as Trafalgar House revealed it was a busted flush, when it mounted a desperate bid for Northern Electric, so Iceland confirmed its core frozen food business was in deep trouble when it tried to buy Littlewoods' chain of high street department stores 18 months ago for £450m. Norway's Kvaerner eventually put Trafalgar House out of its misery. But poor old Iceland has had to limp along alone, unloved and lowly rated.

Since the Littlewoods bid, Iceland's share price has halved as a combination of price wars, late openings and loyalty card launches saw like-for-like sales growth in the fiercely competitive food retail market virtually grind to a halt.

Such has been Iceland's frosty reception in the City that Malcolm Walker, the chairman and chief executive, considered following in Alan Sugar and Anita Roddick's footsteps by attempting to take the company private.

The consensus among analysts yesterday was that the latest wheeze – a 35 per cent capital consolidation – will do little to address the issue of Iceland's long-term profitability.

There is also concern about cost controls if Iceland's move into home delivery proves as successful as trials suggest.

At least the high level of debt incurred from the buy-back will chill Iceland's instincts to make a do-or-die acquisition like Littlewoods – gearing will rise to 130 per cent if the deal is approved.

But it also puts the pursuit of a progressive dividend policy into cold storage. The increased interest bill means pre-tax profits are likely to fall on Nat West's estimates to £49.1m but the reduced number of shares in issue will enable earnings per share to advance 18.5 per cent to 15.2p, implying a prospective price-earnings ratio of less than seven and a yield of 6.8 per cent. On the face of it cheap, but no more than a hold.

Telewest looks to mobile phones for expansion

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Telewest, the UK's largest cable operator, is exploring ways of expanding its recently formed partnership with the £5bn merged cable group planned by Cable & Wireless into mobile telephony in a move which could cut across alliances in the industry.

The discussions, which are understood to be at an early stage, are also thought to have taken place with all four mobile networks aimed at launching a mobile phone product which the two cable groups could market together as the distinction between fixed and mobile phones becomes increasingly blurred.

The talks are sensitive: C&W already partners one of Telewest's main shareholders, the American phone group US West, in One 2 One, the fourth-largest mobile company.

C&W has already pledged to include mobile telephony in its new cable company, C&W Communications (CWC), formed out of the merger of its Mercury subsidiary with two cable operators, Nynex CableComms and Bell Cablemedia. So far C&W has kept investors guessing about whether One 2 One would be brought into the company.

However the latest talks suggest both CWC and Telewest may choose to work with a rival mobile company instead, with the possibility that Orange may emerge as the preferred candidate. A source close to the two partners explained: "It has to be the best product. One 2 One would have to demonstrate that it fulfils that role."

The collaboration between Telewest and CWC already involves a digital cable television service, due to be launched towards the end of this year. They have already leapfrogged plans by BSkyB for a digital satellite dish by announcing the first firm hardware contract



Sticking together: Stephen Davidson is looking for a more coherent approach he believes was previously lacking

with a US electronics group to make the set-top boxes which will enable viewers to access more than 100 channels.

Stephen Davidson, Telewest's chief executive, declined to give details of the latest exploratory talks, but said: "We are looking at a raft of individual matters on which it makes sense to co-operate. It provides a platform for a more cohesive approach which has sometimes been lacking in the cable industry in the past."

Telewest yesterday revealed a 52 per cent rise in revenues

last year to £290.3m and disclosed that it broke even for the first time in 1996 before including the heavy depreciation and interest costs associated with building the network.

Investment during 1996 was £515.6m, taking the total outlay so far to £1.7bn with 65 per cent of the network built. Mr Davidson predicted Telewest would spend a similar amount this year.

The extra spending pushed overall pre-tax losses to £249.9m, compared with £114.7m in 1995.

Exchequer 'set to lose £18m' if duty-free ends

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

The duty-free industry continued its fight for survival yesterday with a new report claiming that the abolition of duty-free shopping in the European Union would reduce UK tax revenues, not increase them.

The report, which was commissioned by the Duty Free Shopping Confederation, claimed that if the planned abolition of duty-free shopping went ahead in 1999 it would cost the UK government £18m a year in lost tax revenue.

It said only 15-25 per cent of current expenditure on tax-free liquor and tobacco would continue after the abolition, yielding annual duty and VAT returns of £120m to the Exchequer. But against that the report said tax returns would be hit by lower corporation tax from the UK drinks and tobacco industry whose profits would be hit. There would also be an impact from lower income tax and national insurance contributions from the jobs it claims would be lost.

Guinness estimates that up to 700 jobs could be lost in the Scotch whisky industry alone. The report said the end of the industry would encourage consumers to switch from products

with a high UK-manufactured content, such as Scotch, to goods with lower UK content. It also predicted that duty-paid sales would switch from the UK to other EU countries where duty rates are lower.

Lord Rees, chairman of the Duty Free Confederation and a former chief secretary to the Treasury, said: "This study shows that duty-free and tax-free shopping is hardly a burden to the taxpayer. We hope the Government will look at the duty-free issue afresh in the light of the findings of the study."

This seemed unlikely yesterday judging by the response from the Customs & Excise department: "We will look at the report but the Government's position remains the same. There will be a transitional period for duty-free shopping which started in 1993 and will run until 1999. After that, it will end."

Though the duty-free shopping industry is fighting its corner, most insiders admit it is a lost cause. Unless overturned, duty and tax-free shopping will be abolished for passengers travelling between EU countries from 30 June 1999.

The industry is worth £1bn a year in the UK and £4bn across the EU. It is estimated 30 million consumers take advantage of duty-free each year in the UK.

BAT eyes life insurance targets

Magnus Grimond

BAT Industries has considered buying the life insurance companies National Provident Institution, National Mutual Life or Scottish Equitable to beef up its provision of financial services products to independent financial advisers (IFAs).

The company identified the three groups last year as part of plans to shore up its main Eagle Star brand in the pensions market. But the tobacco to insurance giant is understood to have later cooled to this acquisition-led policy after market research showed IFAs were keener to deal with investment managers than life offices. The group has also been put off by the high value of around £2bn currently being put upon Scottish Amicable by competing offers for the mutual insurance group.

The three target groups are named in a strategic review drafted by BAT in the run-up to the launch last July of British American Financial Services, the umbrella under which the insurance to fund management operations are now grouped. That saw BAT, headed by Martin Broughton, the chief executive, unveil plans to use its Threadneedle fund management operation to spearhead its attack on the IFA market. The first retail funds under the Threadneedle name are due to be launched in the third quarter, with a range of unit trusts.

Michael Pridoux, head of public affairs at BAT, said he could not comment on information that had been "improperly obtained". He went on: "British American Financial Services has ambitions in the IFA sector, there is no secret about that. The

IFA sector is the fastest growing part of the market, where we are under-represented. We have got some quite interesting plans for dealing with that. Whether an acquisition forms part of that or not remains to be seen."



Martin Broughton: Aiming to shore up Eagle Star brand

The risks of overpaying in that area were readily apparent, he said. They remained interested in a building society he added, "but it is not worth paying a great price to get into the business. You can end up getting bigger, but not necessarily better."

Late last year it was reported that BAT had been in talks to merge its Eagle Star and Allied Dunbar insurance operations with Commercial Union as a prelude to demerging the financial services business. Those talks appear to have come to nothing, but many in the City believe BAT may still be on the look out for an acquisition to give critical mass to BAFS, prior to spinning it off. Splitting the group in two is seen as a way of dealing with the growing clamour for the tobacco side to settle the long-running court battles over smoking-related diseases in the US.

ICL turnaround 'disappointing'

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

ICL, the computer giant, yesterday admitted the scale of its financial turnaround since the sale of its manufacturing operations last year had been disappointing. Keith Todd, ICL's chief executive, also reaffirmed his commitment to float the company on the stock market before 2000.

The results followed ICL's latest bout of restructuring un-

der the 90 per cent ownership of Japanese electronics giant Fujitsu.

A five-point plan to boost profitability included selling the manufacturing business, D2D, to a Canadian company and shifting ICL's focus towards consultancy and service activities. The upheaval was softened by a rights issue raising £200m.

Yesterday Mr Todd said the transformation of ICL was complete but argued the revenues streams from large new con-

tracts would not appear in volume until 1998-99. A £1bn contract with the Post Office to introduce electronic social security benefits payments would net an estimated £200m in additional revenues.

ICL's sales last year shrank by almost £200m to £2.92bn, reflecting the sale of businesses. Losses before tax dropped sharply from £183.3m in 1995 to £25.5m. However the improvement came largely because the impact of the restructuring

process was concentrated on the 1995 results, with a £151.5m exceptional charge. Excluding this, ICL's operating profits fell last year by £6.7m to £25.2m. Mr Todd said profit margins were still just 1 per cent, compared with the group's internal target of 6 per cent.

The results came as Mr Todd outlined a bold new vision for ICL in partnership with Fujitsu to market an Internet-based product which would link computer users around the world.

Company Results

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Anglo Group (F)	(-)	6.57m (13.6m)	8.2p (19p)	(-)
Charles Stephens (F)	25.1m (203m)	22.5m (17.7m)	8.2p (6.5p)	2.9p (2.5p)
William (F)	6.81m (6.85m)	0.04m (4.15m)	1.7p (4.4p)	5.3p (5.3p)
Brentford (F)	140m (143m)	10.2m (5.5m)	9.1p (1.7p)	2.3p (2p)
Church & Co (F)	79.7m (78.4m)	8.4m (4.8m)	31.7p (27p)	15.75p (14.5p)
Hayward Williams (F)	536m (502m)	38m (29m)	22.3p (17.3p)	13.5p (13.5p)
Iceland (F)	1,422m (1,377m)	88.2m (72.8m)	13.18p (17.81p)	6.4p (6.25p)
Intertec (F)	23.0m (21.3m)	1.28m (1.24m)	18.9p (18.1p)	4.5p (3.8p)
Malaysian Group (F)	353m (371m)	2.5m (2.05m)	1p (0.51p)	0.65p (0.55p)
John Warrington (F)	87.2m (24.0m)	3.1m (2.53m)	8.25p (8.75p)	2.5p (2.45p)
Midland Ind Rivers (F)	94.4m (93.3m)	16.8m (15.1m)	8.05p (7.7p)	3.5p (3.5p)
Road Elevator (F)	3,385m (3,215m)	608m (590m)	152.2p (48.1p)	127.4p (24.5p)
Reckitt Benckiser (F)	2.3m (275m)	318m (215m)	17.13p (14.22p)	6.05p (4.2p)
Schweitzer (F)	(-)	230m (197m)	81.9p (71.5p)	20p (18p)
Telewest Comms (F)	290m (145m)	-0.25m (4.11m)	- (10.5p)	(-)
TI Group (F)	1,730m (1,700m)	232m (185m)	34.1p (26.5p)	14.5p (13.1p)

(F) - Final (I) - Interim + EPS and dividend are for fiscal ended last year

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Publisher plays down bid talk

Magnus Grimond

Midland Independent Newspapers, publisher of the *Birmingham Post*, yesterday played down the bid rumours which have buoyed the company's share price recently, saying it had not received any serious approaches.

Chris Oakley, the chief executive, described the suggestions as just speculation. "I read it with interest. We have not had bids from anybody."

The shares, which have only briefly risen above their 140p offer price in 1992, have been a strong market of late on hopes of a bid from Mirror Group, part owners of *The Independent*.

They were up another 5p to 155p yesterday after the group

unveiled a 5 per cent rise in underlying profits to £16.6m.

Mr Oakley suggested much of the speculation had come from the group's Live cable television joint venture in Birmingham with Mirror Group. Midland revealed it had lost £327,000 on its share of the operation last year, taking its total investment so far to £487,000. But Mr Oakley claimed the station's local news was now more popular than rivals CNN, Sky News and MTV, and said it was on target to make profits by 1999.

In newspapers, a poor performance in the first half which led to a profits warning in June was almost reversed in the second six months, leaving operating profits from the division down just £516,000 at £16.9m.

Mr Oakley credited the turnaround on the sale of under-performing titles in Nottingham and Leicester, the acquisition of 10 weekly titles in the surroundings of Birmingham and better market conditions. Newspaper, which had soared to £550 a tonne, ended the year nearly £100 lower, while advertising had picked up as the year wore on, he suggested.

The group figures were flattered by the inclusion of the first full year of Inside Communications, the magazine publisher acquired midway through 1995, which saw its contribution grow from £1.3m to £3.6m.

The total dividend rises 8 per cent to 3.8p, including a final payment of 2.5p.



Warburg's reputation could be badly dented

Poor old SBC Warburg. On the day it announces bumper profits it is also hit by news of a Securities and Futures Authority investigation of its handling of a £300m programme trade. This is not another incident of "rogue trading", nor did it involve Warburg's in any significant monetary loss. But the loss to reputation could be equally significant, for what Warburg's stands accused of, rightly or wrongly, is deliberately trying to disadvantage a client in an area of business - big programme trades - where it is one of the City's market leaders.

The episode bears some repeating. Every week Warburg's executes anything up to 30 big programme trades, where big lines of stock are bought and traded out to the market, and it bids for a lot more. Last October it won the contract to sell off about £300m of shares which were being disposed of as part of the liquidation of the Kleinwort Benson European Privatisation Trust (Kepit). Clients generally accept that the bank has allowed to hedge its position ahead of executing the trade. On this occasion, however, the hedging was so obvious that it alerted the market to what was about to happen.

Foul, yelled Kepit's financial advisers Merrill Lynch, which accused Warburg's of deliberately smashing the prices down to its own advantage. Whether this was actually a case of premeditated price manipulation, or whether it is capable of a more generous interpretation, remains to be seen. This is one of the key questions the SFA is attempting to address.

Whatever the case, there are shades of the old "contracts for differences" row here. The broader point of principle is whether securities houses should be allowed to hedge their positions at all ahead of such large scale transactions.

In time honoured fashion, Warburg's has moved to pre-empt whatever the SFA may do or say. Two traders have gone and the client, though not compensated, was eventually given the sort of favourable prices he might have expected all along.

In other words, everyone's happy. Or are they? The statement accompanying Warburg's results yesterday refers in terms to the bank's "active involvement in block trading, utilising our capital strength and distribution capability in service of our clients". What ever the SFA's eventual findings on the Kepit incident, Warburg cannot emerge well. Whichever way you read it, no client is going to do business with a company it believes might disadvantage its interests.

The fact that this happens the whole time in markets, that practice of this sort is endemic among securities firms, doesn't really lessen the damage. Many people are going to look at the bumper profits and bonuses now being earned in the City and think "now we know why".

How many times before have we heard HICL, the once mighty computer giant, talk of new beginnings and successful transformations? It is only a slight exaggeration

to say that ICL has had more upheavals than British Leyland, British Steel, British Shipbuilding and all the other corporate rescue cases put together.

"ICL now has no factories left," the latest man in the hot seat, Keith Todd proudly announced yesterday as he outlined yet another new dawn as a services, software and consulting organisation. This is a far cry from the 1960s when the UK's entire computer manufacturing capacity was pushed into a merger under the ambitious ride of International Computers Limited by the then minister for technology, Tony Benn. For the following two decades ICL became the very embodiment of the British disease - weak directionless management, poor marketing, underinvestment and tangential technology and product.

The takeover by Fujitsu in 1990 was supposed to change all this, giving ICL the long-term commitment it had so obviously lacked in the past. But the reality has been more of the same traditional British fudge. Sir Peter Bonfield managed to generate a reputation as the company's saviour. Yet just months after he went off to run British Telecom ICL was in the throws of another huge internal restructuring drive.

Selling off the hardware business, the latest big idea, has so far done little to answer the basic question: just what is ICL meant to be about? Mr Todd clearly has grand hopes for the Internet revolution. "We intend to be a leader in the new world," he

says. Well, possibly, but is ICL really any better placed to succeed in this brave new world than its many up and coming rivals. The restructuring last year has done nothing to boost ICL's profitability.

For ICL that long sought after stock market float is always three years away. Yes, there would be a stock market quote before the turn of the century, Mr Todd insisted.

The last time ICL said there was a three year time horizon on its float was - er - about three years ago. The odds are that Mr Todd, or his successor, will still be vainly waiting well into the next millennium.

In two years time the dastardly bureaucrats in Brussels plan to do away with one of the few remaining pleasures available to red-blooded, red-skinned Englishmen - their inalienable right to stock up with duty-free booze and fags on the way back home from holiday in some sun-drenched continental location.

Not surprisingly, the Duty Free Confederation, a motley crew of airport, ferry and airline operators, drinks companies and duty-free shops, are not very keen on the idea. Now they have hired their own consultants, National Economic Research Associates, sent them away with their spread sheets and economic impact models and come up with the startling finding that the abolition of duty free, far from boosting Government receipts, will result

in a net loss to the Exchequer of £18m a year.

According to the research, the increased duty and tax yielded through abolition will be more than offset by lower corporation and income taxes as travellers alter their spending habits, retailers lose sales and employees lose their jobs. Abolishing perks is never popular. But duty free is a perk available only to the overseas traveller and a perk, moreover, directed mainly at the Brits - we account for a quarter of all duty-free sales a year.

If the Duty Free Confederation is concerned about loss of tax revenues and jobs then it would be far better employed campaigning for a lowering of duty paid. The duty on a pint of beer is five-times higher here than in France. Correcting that imbalance to a modest extent would boost sales, preserve jobs and, at a pinch, might even be tax positive, quite apart from reducing the temptation to go booze cruising across the Channel.

The trouble is that the Duty Free Confederation will never lobby for such a tax harmonisation because it is not in the interests of its members who benefit massively and disproportionately from the current duty-free arrangements. The Duty Free Confederation will continue to bang the drum right up to 30 June 1999 but it should be resisted. Why should other taxpayers continue to subsidise the fares of European air and sea travellers in this way?

Relief for industry as pound takes a knock

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

There was relief for manufacturers yesterday as sterling dived more than three pence against the mark to its lowest level since early February. The drop followed remarks by Howard Davies, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, who said financial markets were expecting a fall in the pound.

New figures - yesterday showed that the slow recovery in manufacturing continued in January with no sign the strong pound had hit output anyway.

Manufacturing output



Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, said in a speech last night that sterling posed a dilemma over interest rates, but he repeated the Bank's view that a "moderate" rise was needed to slow domestic demand.

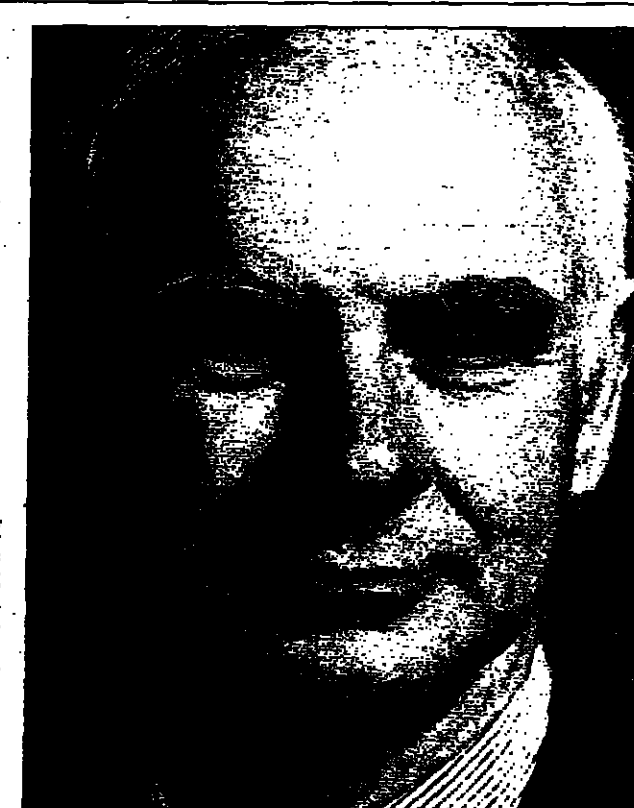
Manufacturing output expanded by 0.3 per cent in January, taking its annual growth up to 1.6 per cent. Output is now rising at the fastest rate for more than a year.

Total industrial output, which also includes electricity, gas and water, North Sea production and mining, was flat. But its year-on-year growth climbed to 2.4 per cent. The sectors which rely most on exports - engineering, cars and chemicals - showed no signs of exchange rate damage.

"These numbers show little evidence at this stage that the stronger pound has hit the export competitiveness of British industry," said Edmund Nisnik, an economist at Nikko.

Martin Brookes at Goldman Sachs said surveys pointed to another jump in manufacturing output last month. "Strong domestic demand has had an offsetting effect," he said.

Recent surveys have, however,



Going down: Howard Davies, of the Bank of England, said markets were indicating a future decline in sterling's value

pointed to a slowdown in the growth of export orders despite the fact that exporters have reduced their prices in a bid to overcome the impact of the strong pound. The Purchasing Managers' Index showed export orders barely increasing, leading some City experts to predict that manufacturing industry will remain fragile.

The Office for National Statistics had revised down output growth at the end of last year. The full year's increase in industrial production was revised up by 0.1 per cent to 1.2 per cent, but the increase in the fourth quarter was revised down from 0.9 per cent to 0.6 per cent.

"That might be enough to take the estimate of GDP growth from just above trend to its trend level," said John O'Sullivan at NatWest Markets.

The size of the quarterly rise in GDP has been one of the decisive factors for interest rates. Revised figures for the fourth quarter are due before Kenneth Clarke and Mr George are due to hold what could be their last monetary meeting on 10 April.

Mr Clarke has also used the strength of sterling to justify turning down the Bank's advice to raise interest rates. The pound ended at DM2.734, compared with the previous day's close of DM2.737.

Rentokil barely delivers on 20 per cent growth promise

Clifford German

Sir Clive Thompson, chief executive of the fast-growing Rentokil Initial industrial services group, has only just managed to keep his promise of delivering 20 per cent annual earnings growth. The company's latest results, released yesterday, showed that earnings per share advanced by 20.5 per cent last year, but only with the aid of the takeover of arch-rival BET.

Profits in the businesses rose by only 9 per cent in 1996, which Sir Clive attributed to the costs of integrating the two companies and unquantified costs of business loss and savings missed through management's time being diverted to the process of integrating BET.

However, he admitted that even without these distractions that earnings growth would have fallen short of the 20 per cent promise - being some-

where between 17 and 19 per cent.

Turnover in the enlarged business rose from £874m to £2.4bn, but profits before tax grew by a more sedate 48 per cent to £318m - which is a reflection of the lower operating margins at BET's businesses. The net dividend goes up in line with earnings to 5.06p.

The existing Rentokil operations increased turnover by 15 per cent to £1.01bn and profits by 9 per cent to £233m.

Group pre-tax profits were in line with expectations and the BET businesses did better than expected, but the poor performance of the original businesses sent the shares down 42.5p to 415.5p.

BET's profit contribution was £84.6m in eight months after charging £31m of interest on the cash element of the cost of buying the company. Its profit margins edged up from



Sir Clive Thompson: Costs of integration hit profits

8.2 to 8.7 per cent. The actual costs of the integration process are included in exceptional costs of £16.4m, which also cover the effect of the stronger pound.

Geographically the acquisition made little difference to the spread of business, although the

contributions from North America increased slightly. By sector, hygiene and cleaning remained the biggest single division generating close to 40 per cent of profits from 30 per cent of group turnover. The acquisition of BET improved the contribution from plant and distribution and personnel services at the expense of pest control, the original core of the Rentokil business 25 years ago. Turnover and profits in that department showed little change last year and it now contributes 30 per cent of profits but less than 10 per cent of turnover.

On prospects, the company is adamant that the setback in the original businesses is temporary and the group is back on course to rebuild margins in the on-going business and to make further improvements in the BET businesses and to deliver a 20 per cent improvement in earnings in 1997.

Media groups reduce BSBK stakeholding

Patrick Toobar

Three media groups - Granada, Pearson and Pathé of France - yesterday sold a 1.1 per cent stake in BSBK, reducing their holding in the satellite operator to 12.8 per cent.

BSB Holdings, the vehicle for the BSBK stake, said it had no intention of selling any more BSBK shares and that Granada, Pearson and Pathé would not sell any more shares for 60 days. "It's just a tidying up exercise," said a spokesman for BSBH.

But analysts insisted the move cleared the way for Pearson, which is busy shuffling its television interests since the arrival of new chief executive Majorie Scardino this year, to

make a final exit from BSBK. The three media companies plan to use the tax benefits from the sale to buy the 6 per cent of BSBH they do not already own.

The sale price was not disclosed, though the 19.5 million shares sold to BSBH for placing with institutional investors would be worth just over £123m at BSBK's closing share price of 632p, down 1p.

The biggest beneficiary from the proposed restructuring will be London Merchant Securities, the property and investment group. LMS said the plans would result in it realising not less than £62m in the summer for its entire investment in BSBH, compared with a current book value of £8.1m.

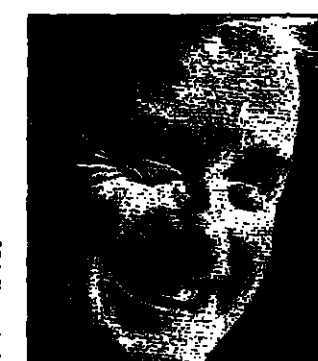
Other shareholders in BSBH, including Lord Hollick's United News & Media will receive about 24m from the deal.

Following the sale, BSBH will own 220.6 million shares in BSBK, representing about 12.8 per cent.

Pearson sold its 9.75 per cent stake in BSBK almost two years ago, but still retains an indirect holding of 4.3 per cent through BSBH worth £467m.

Analysts said that having resolved the problem of minority shareholders in BSBH, Pearson now had to find a way of avoiding a massive capital gains tax bill which would be incurred from selling the rest of its BSBK stake.

In 1995 the High Court dismissed a £170m claim by LMS



Gerry Robinson: Will not sell more shares for 60 days

against four shareholders in the former British Satellite Broadcasting group over the terms of its merger with Rupert Murdoch's Sky group to form BSBK.

LMS had claimed the merger terms were unfair to minority shareholders. BSBK is now 40 per cent owned by Mr Murdoch's News Corporation. Gerry Robinson's Granada and Pathé also hold direct stakes.

Wine drinkers toast HK budget

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

If there is one absolutely clear message which emerges from yesterday's Hong Kong budget it is let them drink wine. Donald Tsang, the colony's financial secretary, revealed that the government coffers were seriously awash with cash but he was proposing to give little away except to wine drinkers who will benefit from a cut in duty from 90 to 60 per cent.

The generosity being shown to wine drinkers is bizarre as few Hong Kong people drink wine, with the possible exception of the financial secretary, and the

people who apparently bug him at dinner parties with concerns over high wine duties. Mr Tsang said this was the "one issue which has plagued me more than most".

That will be news to the many social welfare organisations who fail to understand why a revenue surplus of HK\$15.1bn (£1.2bn) could not have been distributed more generously in their direction. Huang Chen-ya, the economics spokesman for the Democratic Party, said the budget meant that the rich would be able "to drink red wine but the poor will not have enough money for their very living".

The budget surplus was more

than nine times higher than the forecast amount of HK\$1.6bn, mainly because soaring property prices and a buoyant stock market have yielded far higher-than-expected revenues from stamp duty. Government land sales also made a higher-than-anticipated contribution while capital spending failed to materialise at expected levels.

The net result of the growing surplus and accumulation of government reserves means the Hong Kong government will have total reserves of some HK\$359bn (£29bn) to hand over to the incoming Chinese administration which assumes power in July.

This is an infinitely greater sum than was ever expected. A Sino-British agreement signed in 1991 required the departing colonial government to ensure that just HK\$25bn was left in the reserves to be bequeathed to the incoming administration. Mr Tsang has revealed that this amount will be exceeded by more than 14 times.

Little wonder therefore that Chinese officials fully endorsed the last budget delivered under British sovereignty and the first devised in consultation with China, although Mr Tsang denied that China changed any of the plans laid in Hong Kong.

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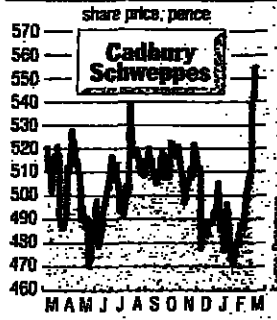
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market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100	4422.5	-21.8
FTSE 250	4725.1	-4.3
FTSE 350	2185.4	-8.9
SEAQ VOLUME	929.1m shares	
	56,306 bargains	
Gilts Index	95.5	-0.27

Share spotlight



Cadbury on a high as fears of US mauling evaporate

Cadbury Schweppes fazed to a 12-month high as worries the soft drinks and sweets group was suffering a mauling in the US continued to fade.

Last week's figures and robust presentation has prompted many to revise their view that the British giant is being squeezed unmercifully by the combined might of Coca-Cola and PepsiCo in the fiercely competitive American drinks market. The shares rose 14.5p to 555p in busy trading, only 6p below their all-time high. They were down to 468.5p ahead of the results.

Although there is a widespread suspicion Cadbury's could be tempted into another big swallow, perhaps around the £2bn mark, the stock market has, it appears, drawn reassurance from indications from chief executive John Sunderland that he is reluctant to indulge in any more share issues to finance expansion.

The Cadbury share rush has also been helped by the inevitable takeover speculation. With a near-£5.5bn capitalisation there are not many possible predators: Unilever, known to be on the take-over trail, and Swiss giant Nestlé could, however, feature in any action.

Enterprise Oil fared 11.5p to 633.5p ahead of what are expected to be exciting results to day which should confirm that the disasters of the abortive Lamsco takeover bid are firmly behind it.

But Enterprise, with an unusually long round of analyst meetings scheduled, could be flexing its muscles for a return to the bid arena.



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

from Enterprise was there was no chance of a bid accompanying today's figures. BSB's shaded to 632p as BZW placed 19.5 million shares with institutions at 628p. The deal will allow smaller shareholders in the satellite television group, such as Next, to realise their stakes. Granada, Pathe and Pearson, with around 12.7 per cent through a vehicle called BSB, say they have no immediate intention of selling more BSB shares.

Hanson gained 3p to 302.5p as it managed to cling on its Footsie membership. Compass, the contract caterer which at one time looked likely to edge Hanson into the sup-

lower at 702.5p but Cookson's presentation enhanced its shares 3p to 247p.

Guinness added 2.5p to 476.5p; the price has frothed up from 426p last month. The spirit to stout group is due to present year's figures next week; a modest 2 per cent increase to around £95m is expected with the group a casualty of the strong pound and sluggish whisky markets.

There are suggestions that chairman Tony Greener is thinking in terms of doing the splits - dividing the group into stand-alone beer and spirit companies. Such a demerger, it is argued, would increase shareholder value. The two other leading British spirit groups, Allied Domeq and Grand Metropolitan have already rejected similar demerger ideas. Break-up talk also resurfaced at BAT Industries, up 7p at 564.5p.

newed talk of more disc deals, rose 16p to 230.5p and Amstrad, the Alan Sugar electronics vehicle, was little changed at 203.5p despite talk of mobile telephone and digital television deals.

UK Oil & Gas, where Sir Robert Horton (ex-BP) is chairman, fell 9p to 34.5p, perilously close to its 34p rights issue price. The shares were 225p two years ago. Scotia, the drugs group, remained under pressure following its diabetic drug setback, falling further 30p to 405p. But Shield Diagnostic's rampant progress continued, up another 62.5p to 717.5p. Iceland's share buyback overcame a disappointing 23 per cent profit decline to lift the shares 12p to 99.5p.

Campbell & Armstrong, the shopfitter, held at 6.25p. It has acquired for a nominal sum DF Retail Solutions which brings with it sales of £4m.

Premier Health, a nursing agency, jumped 8.5p to 159p, highest for nearly two years; the shares were 4p last month but touched 129p three years ago. The excitement stems from plans to reorganise its important but troublesome transatlantic operations. There are also hopes the group, formerly called Acis, has had a strong second half-year.

Springwood, the leisure group run by Adam Pegg, is riding near its high at 127.5p amid hopes of further expansion moves. Mr Pegg created the old Midsummer Leisure, taken over after an acrimonious battle.

Wedderburn, the property group, has moved into oil trading through a £5.2m share-exchange reverse takeover of Tempo, a Swiss business. The shares are suspended at 24p.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend	Yield
FTSE 100	4422.5	-	-	-
FTSE 250	4725.1	-	-	-
FTSE 350	2185.4	-	-	-
SEAQ VOLUME	929.1m	-	-	-
Gilts Index	95.5	-	-	-

Company	Share Price	P/E Ratio	Dividend	Yield
Alcoholic Beverages	-	-	-	-
Banks, Merchant	-	-	-	-
Banks, Retail	-	-	-	-
Engineering Vehicles	-	-	-	-
Extractive Industries	-	-	-	-
Food Manufacturers	-	-	-	-
Food Distribution	-	-	-	-
Health Care	-	-	-	-
Household Goods	-	-	-	-
Investment Trusts	-	-	-	-
Leisure & Hotels	-	-	-	-
Life Assurance	-	-	-	-
Media	-	-	-	-
Pharmaceuticals	-	-	-	-
Printing & Paper	-	-	-	-
Property	-	-	-	-
Retailers, Food	-	-	-	-
Retailers, General	-	-	-	-
Services	-	-	-	-
Telecommunications	-	-	-	-
Textiles & Apparel	-	-	-	-
Tobacco	-	-	-	-
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Utilities	-	-	-	-
Waste	-	-	-	-
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46	94	LifeStar	360	-1	20	126	458	223	24	Cart	367	3	3	135	47
46	25	Liberty	372					262		Discount Group	320		3	37	47
46	121	United	370					17		Eastman	377		3	12	47
46	126	United Cm	364					256		Patco	377		29	4	46
46	167	WFI	368					302		Peter J	360		17	14	229
46	167	WFI	368					302		Tom Pate	360	+0	22	22	40
46	167	WFI	368					302		Go Home	360	+0	14	205	40
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Serious bettors are undemonstrative but insistent. They don't expect a strike every time but their boundless optimism can be contagious

... We shall have to wait and see whether the ground causes Michael Hourigan to withdraw Dorans Pride from today's Gold Cup, but even questionably in view of the importance of the event, it is an event to be approached with the utmost caution.

Incidentally, in the opinion of some respected veterans there could be a further endorsement of Martin Pipe's method in the performance of Challenger Du Luc. It may all go to show what an idle rumour can do.

"The Scots are on a roll after their game against Ireland and we know they will come here with a lot of desire, generosity, and fire. If we can't compete with them in those aspects of the game, we'll never be able to dominate and play the way we intend to."

■ Stewards at the National Stadium, will prevent souvenir hunters digging up pieces of the turf at the end of Saturday's Five Nations match between Wales and England at Cardiff Arms Park. A Welsh Rugby Union spokesman said: "We are telling the stewards to be extra vigilant because there are still two important matches to be staged at the ground before it is redeveloped."

PORT - in association with
Around the resorts

هكذا من الأصل

Venables' troops survive perilous mission to Macedonia

Those who thought Terry Venables picked up a nice, uncomplicated earner in the sun coaching Australia had not reckoned on the job taking him to Macedonia.

The Balkan country, surrounded by Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia, yesterday hosted Venables' first match with his Australian team in Europe. The former England coach had sought an international to test his foreign-based squad, several of whom play with British clubs.

Macedonia, who entertain the Republic of Ireland in a World Cup qualifier next month, invited the Australians and their famous coach for a game here in the capital, Skopje, a city of a million people set amid snow-capped mountains.

However, what should have been a low-key friendly was soon overshadowed by off-field problems that even involved the Macedonian government. The trouble started when the Football Union of Macedonia (FUM) unexpectedly shifted the game 100 miles south of Skopje to the city of Bitola, apparently to appease fans in that remote region.

A perturbed Venables had the venue checked out, and he was told it was unfit to stage an international because of the poor pitch, lack of any changing rooms and no spectator seating. Australia threatened to cancel the game unless it was moved back to Skopje. Venables contacted Macedonia's embassy in London, which became involved in persuading its football authorities to back down.

Although the match was saved, administrators from both sides found other sources of dispute. The most pronounced was an argument about television rights, which Soccer Australia (the game's governing body there), had already sold - only to be told by the FUM that it wanted to sell these rights direct to Australian broadcasters planning to show the game live.

Soccer Australia's chief executive, David Hill, threatened to lodge a complaint with Fifa, world football's governing body, because of the Macedonians' conduct over the television rights. The players were not spared their share of misadventures. The Rangers defender, Craig Moore, missed a connecting flight from London because of fog and had to drop out. George Kulsar, who has just joined Bradford City from Antwerp, caught the plane in time but three suitcases full of possessions he was moving to Yorkshire from Belgium never showed up in Skopje.

Soccer Australia had risked offending Australia's vast Greek community just by coming to Macedonia, which is known in the football world as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia because the Greeks claim ownership of the name of Macedonia. Soccer Australia is also not overly popular with the 300,000 Macedonians living "Down Under" after their football clubs became casualties of official policy to de-ethnicise the national league.

Despite the aggravation surrounding this game, Venables was charming to his hosts and still focused on preparing his players, who believe his know-how can help take Australia to the World Cup finals for the first time since 1974.

Leicester surpass own expectations

Simon Grayson yesterday looked ahead to Leicester's Coca-Cola Cup final appearance at Wembley following Tuesday's semi-final victory over Wimbledon and recalled how he thought his season was over just seven weeks ago.

The defender was the victim of a late tackle in the final minute of Leicester's fifth round win at Ipswich which left his legged open and his ankle with serious ligament damage.

However, the injury was not as bad as he or Martin O'Neill, his manager, originally feared, and now Grayson feels more able to forgive and forget.

"At the time I really thought I wouldn't play again this season," said Grayson. "It was a really bad one and I feared the worst. I still can't believe [Richard Naylor of Ipswich] wasn't sent off for it, but luckily it wasn't as serious as we all thought. In fact I was back after one game and I have thoroughly enjoyed everything since - everything except Chelsea, of course."

But while the hotly disputed penalty which knocked them out of the FA Cup has clearly worked as a motivator, the 27-year-old suggested that being written off before the season even started had been an even bigger factor in their success.

"I don't think anybody outside the club would have believed we could do as well as we have," Grayson said.

"When we went up to Sunderland for the first Premiership game we were picking out the papers and reading that everyone was saying we were certain to go down."

"All that did was give us the determination and desire to prove everybody wrong - and that's what's happened. Of course we've done it by hard work and a good team spirit, but if we're honest we've probably surpassed what even we thought we could achieve. That's down to belief."

After their victory over Wimbledon at Selhurst Park on Tuesday night, which followed on from play-off success last

Liverpool make move for Citko

ALAN NIXON

The future of Stan Collymore at Anfield may come under threat if Roy Evans attempts to sign the Polish international Marek Citko from Liverpool.

The 22-year-old Widzew Lodz striker, who is due to arrive in Liverpool today for talks, has been a key player for his club since he joined them a month after Citko turned down Blackburn Rovers, saying he wanted to stay in Poland and become a priest. Instead, it seems, his vocation may lie at Anfield.

Nottingham Forest have taken their spending to £5.5m in the space of 72 hours with the £1m signing of the striker Ian Moore from Tottenham Rovers. It follows the arrival on Monday at the City Ground of Celtic's Pierre van Hooijdonk for £4.5m.

Moore, the son of the former Tranmere player Ronnie Moore, shot to prominence last season when he scored in five successive League games. He has five England Under-21 caps.

A deal has been struck between Brighton's co-owners Bill Anker and Greg Stanley and the prospective buyers of the Third Division club, led by Brighton-born businessman Dick Knight. Details of the deal have been held up for legal consideration. Peter Schneider is set for another round of talks with his legal team before stating whether

he is prepared to sell his club to Ian Wright. The Manchester United goalkeeper, who has refused to comment, met with the club's solicitor, Maurice Watkins, yesterday after the publication of a letter from the FA imploring both players to make up.

West Ham's Welsh international defender Mark Bowen is to join Ossie Ardiles's Japanese side, Shimizu S-Pulse, for £1m. Lee Richardson will miss Newcastle's UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg tie in Monaco next Tuesday after aggravating a hamstring strain in Newcastle's 4-3 defeat by Liverpool on Monday.

Bournemouth are nearer to closure after their major creditor, Lloyds Bank, rejected a takeover bid of more than £1m from a consortium of supporters and local businesses.

Lincoln's Terry Fleming has been banned for three matches after giving a team-mate's name to avoid being sent off. Fleming gave the name of Tony Dennis to referee Paul Taylor when he was shown the yellow card for the second time, and stayed on the pitch during the Third Division match against Wigan last month.



The Leicester goalkeeper, Kassey Keller, consoles Robbie Earle at Selhurst Park on Tuesday. Photograph: Reuter

Cadete's promise to Celtic fans

Jorge Cadete leaned heavily on his popularity with Celtic's fans when he made a public appearance at the opening of a shop yesterday in the wake of Tuesday's 2-0 defeat at Kilmarnock. The Portuguese international told supporters: "We owe it to you to beat Rangers again."

It would be an understatement to describe that defeat against a team struggling to stay clear of relegation as a disappointment for a side who are desperately trying to stop their Glasgow rivals from matching their record of nine successive championship titles.

"It was just one of those games which has no explanation," Cadete said. "You want and need to win but end up losing. Even when Peter Grant and I both hit the crossbar in the first half I didn't give up hope."

"If you hit the bar in the first minute of a match and think it will not be your day, why bother playing the other 89? We were 1-0 down for 75 minutes at Rugby Park earlier this season but won 3-1, and I kept hoping we could do that again."

Paolo Di Canio was sorely missed by Celtic after the Italian helped inspire last Thursday's Tennessean Scottish Cup quarter-final victory over Rangers at Parkhead. "You always miss quality players like Paolo, but injuries happen to every team," Cadete said.

The striker wants Celtic to make it up to their fans by repeating the cup success over Rangers, when the sides meet again in the League at Parkhead on Sunday, to keep their title hopes alive.

"We must forget the Kilmarnock game. We can't change it. We've one game to think about, which is Sunday's, and the fans deserve to see another win over Rangers," he said.

Di Canio is still rated doubtful for Sunday with the hamstring injury which forced him off at half-time after scoring a penalty against Rangers last week.

Celtic will open contract talks this afternoon with three players who could walk out of Parkhead for nothing this summer. Tosh McKinlay, Peter Grant and Malky Mackay will all be out of contract at the end of the season.

Raymond Sparkes, their agent, will open discussions on their future with Celtic's financial director, Eric Riley. Any foreign clubs who want to sign Mackay and McKinlay for nothing when their deals run out will be watching with interest.

"There are options other than Celtic open to the players and this is just the first stage of talks," Sparkes said. "I can't speculate on how they might go. It is an initial chat and we will take it from there."

SPORTING DIGEST

Weale leads Wales to famous win

Wales, who are attempting to bridge a 16-year gap since their last home international indoor championship, made an excellent start in Ballymoney yesterday when they beat the defending champions, Scotland.

The Scots, chasing a record seventh successive title, forged into a 60-57 halfway lead, but Wales then recovered and moved 95-78 ahead with 15 of the scheduled 21 ends completed. The Scots rallied over the last quarter, but Wales held on for their eighth-shot victory. "I am disappointed, but not despondent - we can still win it," the Scottish team-manager, John Ross, said.

The tour of the Welsh camp was Robert Weale, who guided his side to crushing a 38-10 win over Robert Provan. John Price added a 21-15 win against Richard Corrie and Jason Greenleed edged out Graham Robertson 21-19.

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The business of betting
Ken Jones at the
Cheltenham Festival, page 24

sport

Make or break
Dave Hadfield previews the new
Super League season, page 25



'It's time to watch the fellahs in the big hats'



A day at the races: The punters (right) apply their own favoured systems to the race card at Cheltenham yesterday, hoping that they can hit upon some winners. In the Coral Cup Handicap Hurdle (above) they were looking for Big Strand, which got up on the line to pip his Martin Pipe stable-mate, Allegation

Deep in the heart of the Arkle Bar, Finbar isn't sure where he is. "I can't remember if I'm at a funeral, off sick or what," he says. "It'll come back to me."

The one place he won't be is out on the rails, where a prying television camera might betray him to his employers. "We'll be here all meeting," says Finbar of the handy spot a length and a half from the bar.

Finbar and his friends, Pat and John (some names have been changed to protect the guilty of conscience), are from County Cork and part of what may be the most benign exodus in the history of a country that is accustomed to mass move-

ments. Around 5,000 Irishmen make the annual pilgrimage to Cheltenham, and few leave disappointed.

"I've been coming 20 years and it gets better every year," Pat says. "There's a buzz about the place we can't resist."

"It's the best National Hunt there is," Finbar adds. "They go at a terrific lick. There are no tactics here. Nobody avoids Cheltenham."

Even a local inflation rate that would put Kenneth Clarke out of a job is greeted with tolerance. "I don't know that the money really matters. We know the prices are up this week. We'd do the same ourselves," Pat says.

Matt Tench spends a day among the many Irishmen who make an annual pilgrimage to the Cheltenham Festival

There is much talk of wives but no chance of the distaff side being invited to join the party. "What we do is ring them up in the evening and say our backs are hurting, and we're not enjoying it, and how we miss them," Finbar says.

The Festival began badly for the Irish, with the nation which produced seven successes last year emerging winnerless from the opening day's hostilities. In common with most of their

countrymen, Finbar, Pat and John were nursing their bruises before yesterday's first race. "I think we could see some strokes pulled today. It's time to watch the fellahs in the big hats," Finbar says.

Just then J P McManus, owner of Istabraq - the Irish banker of the meeting, appears on a TV screen. "And there's the fellah with the biggest hat of all," Finbar adds in a tone close to veneration.

Only Pat backed Istabraq but all three cheered him home. There was approval of every aspect of his Irishness. For jockey Charlie Swan: "Oh sure, everybody knows Charlie. He's the most approachable fellah you could want. For trainer Aidan O'Brien: "A lovely unassuming fellah." And for McManus: "J P is the man." The second Irish victory, by Florida Pearl in the closing bumper, went some to restoring national pride.

Finbar explained that they did not back horses just because they were Irish ("betting is not about sentiment") but if their horse was beaten they would al-

ways cheer an Irish one home. Which explained why all would be rooting for Danoli in today's Gold Cup, although none were certain to support him financially.

"He's our Desert Orchid. He's the horse who's in the colours of the housewives of Ireland," John said.

Pat, who was there for Dawn Run's victory in 1986, reckons a Danoli triumph would be even bigger. "It will be up there with Arkle," he says. "Arkle was the greatest there has ever been, but Danoli would be an unbelievable achievement. If he wins there will be a riot here. We have been warned."



Andrew's England recall stuns King

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWITT

Saint Jack the Evangelist, high priest of 21st century "interactive rugby", turned in dramatic fashion yesterday and reinvented himself as a born-again pragmatist by recalling Rob Andrew to the England squad at the age of 34. Quite what coach Rowell's extraordinary decision will do for his side's chances of beating Wales in Cardiff on Saturday to land the Triple Crown was rather less clear than the effect it was likely to have on young Alex King.

While Andrew turned up at

the team's Marlow hotel yesterday to a fusillade of good-natured stick from his old England colleagues - "come on the Messiah," roared Jason Leonard from an open window, "I thought you'd arrive on a donkey," shouted Will Carling - King, the fast-developing outside-half from Wasps who was drafted into the squad last week as cover for Paul Grayson and Mike Catt, was left to reflect on an unnecessarily brutal blow to his self-esteem.

Grayson's hip injury was still giving the England selectors grave cause for concern yesterday and Andrew's re-emergence from a year's international retirement held out the possibil-

ity, however slim, that he would go eyeball-to-eyeball with Jonathan Davies, his great adversary from as far back as 1985, at some point during the proceedings at the Arms Park.

"The selectors feel they have problems with goal-kicking reserves on the bench and I've simply agreed to cover a situation that may or may not develop," said Andrew, a 70-cap veteran whose duties as director of rugby at Sir John Hall's Newcastle effectively rendered England as a commitment he could do without.

"The request from Jack surprised me and I thought about declining, but after giving it a

great deal of thought over 24 hours I decided that I was in a position to help out. I'm quite happy with my form and fitness but I should point out that this is not the start of a come-back by any stretch of the imagination. It's purely a one-off."

"When I was contacted, it did strike me that I might be facing Jonathan once again. It's not something I envisaged - in fact it's a very strange set of circumstances - but all I've done is respond to a request from the England management."

All very romantic, but wrong all the same. Having sent for King, who Rowell unhesitatingly described yesterday as "a key el-

ement in our thinking for the 1999 World Cup", the selectors betrayed him by pulling in an old lag over his head. Unbelievably, Rowell claimed that King would rest positively to what amounted to a kick in the teeth. King's expression as he left for training at Bishopscote suggested something very different.

"We expect Paul Grayson to play against Wales, but Rob is experienced, a No 10 and a place-kicker," Rowell said.

"Alex is not a place-kicker at club level and as I have repeatedly said this season, we have an issue here. This is a one-off situation; we've done a lot of building for the future this

season but on this occasion Rob is the simple solution."

If Grayson pulls out - he faces a fitness test today - Catt, another occasional club kicker, will start against Wales in the pivot position, with Andrew on the bench. Ironically, Rowell revealed that had Tim Stimpson, his full-back, been first choice goal-kicker at Newcastle, King would have held his place among the replacements. And who is the Newcastle goal-kicker at present? Step forward Rob Andrew.

Phil de Glanville, the England captain, reacted uncomfortably to Andrew's call-up. He did his best to avoid commenting on the situation but he

said: "I don't see why outside-half and full-backs should be automatically pigeon-holed as kickers. There is no reason that I can see why centres, wings or even forwards should not work hard on their kicking. After all, we've just been beaten by France thanks to the goal-kicking of a centre, Christophe Lamaison."

"There are a number of things floating around behind the scenes - the Lions tour in the summer is an obvious one - but for all that, we are very focused on the match in Cardiff. We know we have a lot to do and it's important that we show the mental toughness that was

missing at important times against France."

De Glanville contributed to the irony of the situation in which England find themselves by labelling Neil Jenkins, the Welsh full-back and goal-kicker, as the major threat to England's chances of Triple Crown glory. "He is phenomenal," he said. "Any chance from half-way in is an almost guaranteed three points for the Welsh. In fact, they have big players in key positions and if we do not put the lessons we learned against France into practice, it will be a very long afternoon."

Lamaison on verge of glory, page 24

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD
No. 3245, Thursday 13 March By Phil Wednesday's Solution

ACROSS

- Small ruling class made up of rich, gay and mostly old characters (9)
- Everyone's to look at mostly narrow passage (5)
- Man has reserve when embracing the birds (7)
- One former railways recalled, brought in to adjust motor (7)
- Network put back introduction of electricity with a sad air (5)
- Warning spirited horse in part of beach (9)
- A precipitate prediction? (7, 8)
- Glass sure is broken, not indicative of a sweet disposition (9)
- Senior police officer is splendid (5)
- Zealous umpire put back opening (7)
- Fuel company, one investing in cement (3, 4)
- Girl ensnaring fashionable polish (5)
- Salesman mostly keen to enthrall children making a second try (9)

DOWN

- Bridge player drinks in Sussex countryside (5, 5)
- State: "Most of crime came incomplete, with nothing fixed" (8)
- Simple dossier containing account (6)
- Mountaineer's first to penetrate one peak (4)
- Gosh! Tories in disarray over America - very strange (10)
- Flower's surrounded by twisted leaf in knitwear design (4, 4)
- Unpigmented area? Floor-covering includes a little black (6)
- It flows through a city (Newcastle) (4)
- Pro getting payment - without it sport packed up a form of penalty (10)
- Captivated, half-enthused, then embarrassed about a couple of lines (10)
- Firm hurried to absorb study (8)
- Old jars containing concoction of pea or ham (8)
- Herb I located initially in rock climbing (6)
- Look for attention in school (6)
- One's found in foot? No, hand (4)
- TV programmes adult ignored - they're distracting (4)

WEDNESDAY'S SOLUTION

1. OVERSHOE 2. FRAPPE 3. REALM 4. INSOLVENT 5. BOSH 6. TROUSERS 7. DERRARE 8. VARIETIES 9. O.G. 10. D.S.H. 11. RUNTHEGAUNTLET 12. G.A. 13. GASH 14. WARRIOR 15. D.O.G. 16. E.A.O. 17. FELLAH 18. CASTIRON 19. D.O.E. 20. N.D.

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Van Hooijdonk under no illusions at Forest

Football
JOE PARKINSON

Pierre Van Hooijdonk came through a rough Premiership ride on his Nottingham Forest debut on Tuesday night and admitted that life in England was just as tough as he expected.

The 27-year-old Dutchman found Colin Hendry in typically uncompromising mood as Forest paraded their new club record signing in the 1-1 draw at Ewood Park.

Van Hooijdonk did not manage a single effort on goal and his night of frustration was typified when he was booked after a 70th-minute challenge on Henning Berg, even though it looked as though the striker was more sinistred than sinister. But the man who netted Celtic an instant £3m when he arrived at the City Ground on Monday to complete a deal that will see the Parkhead club paid another £500,000 if Forest remain in the Premiership, maintained he had already braced himself for the ordeal.

"If you look at the quality of the players in the Premier League, then in every game you are up against the best defenders in England and sometimes in Europe," said Van Hooijdonk, who will bring Celtic another £1m bonus if he breaks the 20-goal barrier in each of his first two full seasons at Forest.

"It will be hard but it will be a good experience for me and it was one of the reasons why I came to Forest. And I certainly don't think I will score as many goals here as I did in Scotland. I will try, of course, but this league is a little bit different to the one I've been playing in.

"It will be harder playing against top players but that's the point in playing in a top league, it shows you how good you really are."

Van Hooijdonk certainly never had a problem finding the net at Parkhead, scoring 56 goals in 86 starts after switching from NAC Breda two years ago, including the strike that brought an end to Celtic's six-year trophy famine in the 1995 Scottish Cup final.

But a pay dispute clouded the last six months of his time in Glasgow and, when Van Hooijdonk began to see his international chances fade under Tommy Burns, he jumped at the chance to move south of the border. It was a move that now sees him embroiled in a relegation fight rather than Celtic's top-of-the-table quest to prevent Rangers running off with their ninth title on the trot, but even that did not deter the lanky striker.

"I felt that the fact that I was not playing for Celtic could cost me my place in the Dutch squad," Van Hooijdonk said. "If I am not playing then obviously the manager will go for someone else, so the opportunity to go to Forest in the Premier League was a good one."

"I think Forest will stay in the Premier League, but even if we went down I think I would still get in the Dutch squad if I was doing well in the First Division. "Patrick Kluijver, Dennis Bergkamp and Ronald de Boer also play in my position for Holland, and they are not the worst strikers in the world, but I usually come on when Holland need to force something. That's why it is important for me to play, whether it is in the Premier

League or the First Division."

It is certainly going to be a tall order for Forest to survive. They remain just one place and three points better off than third-bottom Southampton and have played three games more than the three sides occupying the relegation places.

Blackburn, though, now look clear of danger after taking their run to just three defeats in the 18 Premiership matches since Tony Parkes became stand-in manager in October.

It now seems certain that Parkes will be handing over a Premiership club to Roy Hodgson when he arrives from Internazionale in the summer - although the Rovers midfielder Billy McKinlay is taking nothing for granted.

"They are still all big games and the quicker we get to the 40-point mark the better we will feel," said the Scot, who was booked 15 minutes into his return from suspension. "Wimbledon on Saturday will be tough, but we feel that we are capable of beating anyone at home."

Oldham are facing a losing race against the clock to make the £400,000 signing of the Raith Rovers striker Tony Rougier. The Trinidad international impressed Oldham's manager, Neil Warnock, in a trial on Tuesday, but the English First Division side will have to sell before they buy.

Although Warnock is trying to move out top scorer Sean McCarthy, who could go before the transfer deadline on 27 March, it may be too late for Rougier. Oldham would have to apply for a new work permit for him and the documents may take too long to push through. More football, page 27



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